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THE FLIGHT OF FAVIEL



R. E. VERNEDE



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"Mr. Faviel!" cried Judith, in amaze.—*Page 294.*

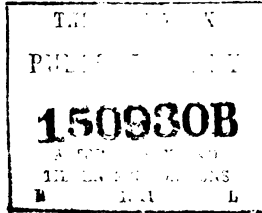
THE FLIGHT OF FAVIEL

By
R. E. VERNÈDE

With Frontispiece by
GEORGE VARIAN



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PREFACE

BUTTERFLIES should not be broken on wheels, and equally perhaps a book that is only intended for light comedy should not have a preface explaining it. Still, a preface is not a crime—especially if it is a short preface. What I want to explain in it is this. Mr. Faviel was received with great kindness in England when he made his appearance there, both by readers and critics.

The critics were indeed so kind that it wasn't till I happened to go to Vermont, and met an even kinder critic (kinder because he spared not) that I discovered that the plot of Mr. Faviel's adventures was not so lucid as it should have been. That was worse than a crime, and everybody knows what is worse than a crime. Of course the adventures were all clear enough to me, but I had not put them down on paper.

Well—before submitting them to the American public, I have remedied that particular fault—at least I hope so. In any case, I have, by the light of my kind American critic's advice, revised and added so much that I almost feel as if I had written a new book. To celebrate the effort, I have given it a new name—The Flight of Faviel.

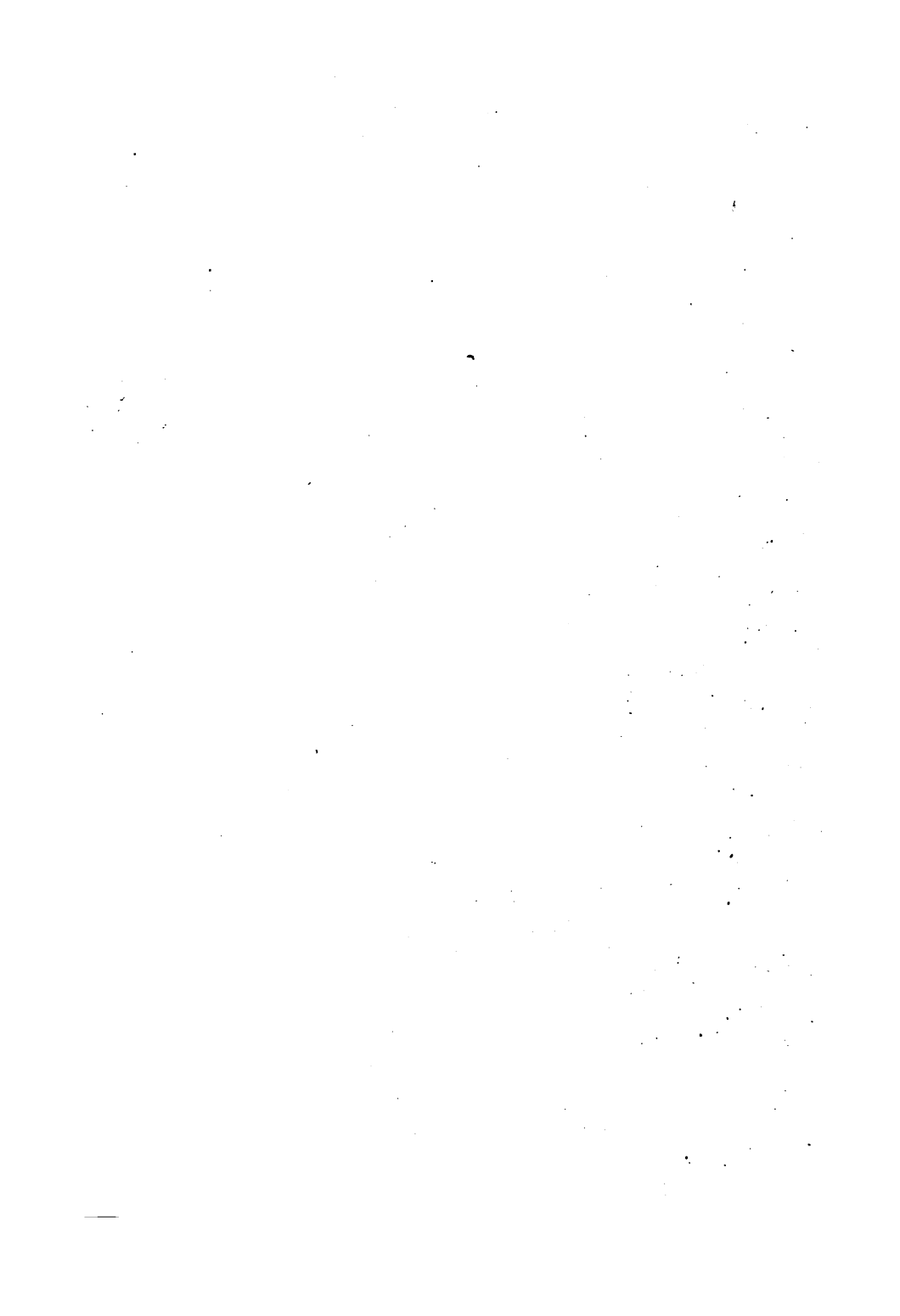
THE AUTHOR.

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THE FLIGHT OF FAVIEL



THE FLIGHT OF FAVIEL

CHAPTER I

MISS MALLENDON'S IDEAL

It was unworthy of his luck, Mr. Richard Faviel thought, that he should be sitting in Room IV.—or was it Room V.?—of Burlington House, in a tepid splash of sunlight, *tête-à-tête* with Lady Mallendon. He liked Lady Mallendon, and her sudden simple confidences and her equally sudden shrewd criticisms, all quite characteristic, but mostly about nothing in particular. Only a *tête-à-tête* with Lady Mallendon was a somewhat less attractive affair than he had contemplated when he pursued her and her niece from the corner of Piccadilly into the headquarters of British Art. It seemed a pity that Miss Judith Mallendon should be looking at the pictures alone.

The only consolation Mr. Faviel had was that Lady Mallendon's confidences had only a moment ago taken a most interesting turn.

"Don't you think, Mr. Faviel, that Judith has arrived at a marriageable age?"

Faviel had thought so on and off, but mostly on, for the last six months, but he contrived to convey an air of having bestowed his best attention upon a sudden poser before he replied.

"On the whole—yes——"

"That's what I think," said Lady Mallendon. "Of course, Judith is barely twenty."

"It is young," Faviel allowed, feeling his way.

"I was married at seventeen myself, however."

"But then Sir Jasper," said Faviel delicately, "knew that if he didn't——"

"Well, there were several others, it's true, Mr. Faviel," said Lady Mallendon, with a nod that was as good as a blush, "though I dare say you don't really believe it at all. Still it was nice of you to say it. Old women love compliments. Sir Jasper is very clever at them—if only he wouldn't take photographs of me. But what I was going to say—about Judith, you know—was that though she seems reserved, and the kind of girl who would be ready to wait quite a long time, I'm not at all sure that she wouldn't be very happy as a married woman."

"Somebody would be very happy as a married man," said Faviel.

Lady Mallendon nodded vigorously.

"I think so," she said.

"I suppose the difficulty is to find the right man?"

"Well, it was," said Lady Mallendon.

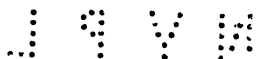
"Was?" he said, parrot-like.

"But I believe he's found!"

"How——" Faviel paused a moment to draw his breath and find the right word. "How jolly!" He was trying to think if he ought to have foreseen that Lady Mallendon's confidence was going to lead up to something of this sort.

"Yes," she pursued, "I really think so. You know Judith's ideal has always been a strenuous man."

"Topping ideal!" said Faviel dully. He was aware



that he was not the sort of man who is generally called strenuous himself.

"The kind of man who does things," continued Lady Mallendon, elaborating her notion in all apparent innocence, "and—and can pull the strings."

"What sort of strings?" He had to ask something for form's sake.

"Oh—strings," said Lady Mallendon vaguely. "We met him at the Tattams' for the first time a fortnight ago. Such a fine-looking man. He arranged to meet us here this morning—for the pictures, of course. But I dare say you understand why I suggested to Judith that she should go on and look at the pictures by herself while we sat here."

Faviel was afraid he did understand. Lady Mallendon's guilelessness made things very obvious. While he sat having undesired confidences thrust upon him, the strenuous man was acting as escort to Judith Mallendon. As more than escort probably.

"Yes," Lady Mallendon rattled on, "I can remember how Sir Jasper and I enjoyed looking at some pictures together. One picture I can still see—particularly the frame. Oh, dear!"

She stopped short and emitted a little cry of regret—looking ahead of her.

"What is it?" asked Faviel.

"There *is* Mr. Blenkenstein!"

"Mr.—Who?"

"I am afraid he has missed Judith." Lady Mallendon rose.

Out of the string of people that was winding round the room, a tall heavy-built man had stepped towards them. He was of the well-groomed description; fine-looking only by reason of his size and a pair of blue

eyes that had a glint of the police-constable in them. At present his eyes were fixed upon Faviel in a polite stare indicating complete want of recognition. The lower part of his face was wreathed into a smile of pleasure at the sight of Lady Mallendon. Mr. Blenkenstein had evidently practised that smile in front of a mirror with a stop-watch.

"Met him at the Tattams', did they?" said Faviel to himself, as he observed Lady Mallendon's greeting with recovered serenity. He knew Mr. Blenkenstein, and Mr. Blenkenstein knew him, in spite of the fact that, for the casual observer, he did not recognize him. He was rather glad that he knew Blenkenstein and that Blenkenstein failed so decisively to recognize him. It laid on Blenkenstein to some extent the onus of beginning an antagonism which was bound to come in any case, and it justified his rival in making that antagonism a deliberate one rather than the courteous affair of two men in love with one maid.

At the same time there was something to admire in Blenkenstein's attitude. It was adept, if nothing else. The fellow could not have expected to see him—probably never even dreamt that Faviel knew the Mallendons—yet on the spur of the moment he had made up his mind to disclaim acquaintanceship. He must have said to himself, "It is just possible this one-time acquaintance of mine is intimate enough with Lady Mallendon to warn her against me. I shall discount anything he says—and have a chance of countering—by showing from the first that we are not on speaking terms."

Faviel beamed upon his antagonist. Lady Mallendon had already shaken hands in her most charming manner.

"And have you been long here?" she was anxious to know.

"I came at the time we fixed. I've been looking for you and Miss Mallendon since. It's my stupidity, I expect."

"Oh, no, mine," said Lady Mallendon. "Judith will be so disappointed. She has just been walking up and down looking at the pictures. Mr. Faviel and I—do you know Mr. Faviel, Mr. Blenkenstein?—have been sitting here——"

"Chatting," said Faviel, smiling pleasantly at Blenkenstein's affectation of making a new acquaintance.

"Ah, indeed!" said Blenkenstein, without any show of interest.

"About you——"

"And all sorts of things," said Lady Mallendon, a little nervously, though without understanding why Mr. Blenkenstein looked glum. "Mr. Faviel is so sympathetic. But you mustn't tell Mr. Blenkenstein what I've been saying about him, Mr. Faviel, will you? It might make him conceited, and——"

"Shall we try and find Miss Mallendon?" asked Blenkenstein.

"Certainly. Good-by, Mr. Faviel. We shall see you on the 29th. And your friend, Mr. Wilton? Delightful——"

Lady Mallendon was hurried off, feeling a little abrupt and apologetic, and it was Faviel's turn to look glum. If Lady Mallendon's words, about Judith's disappointment, were true (and certainly girls do sometimes like brutes) where did he come in? Nowhere, that he could see. But were they true? He had a sudden and overwhelming desire to find out, and

started to his feet with that purpose. Having got that length, he remembered that for all practical purposes the enemy held the commanding position for the day. He could not put the question under Blenkenstein's very nose, with Lady Mallendon also in opposition. And yet if he did not, Blenkenstein might. Indeed Lady Mallendon had hinted that he was there for that very purpose.

Halting under the picture of a stout man, whose chain of office and scarlet robes proclaimed him a mayor, in order that (the sightseers being fewer at this spot) he might reflect for a minute or two without being informed that he was in the way, Faviel was roused by a slap in the back, and the following words delivered in a voluble Irish voice:—

“ ’Tis a pretty picture, Dick, me boy, but ye’ll never have the figure for’t yourself, so don’t be looking so green-eyed jealous. They might, indade, elect ye mayor if ye took up butchering or some respectable trade, but they would not have your portrait painted. Ye would not fit in with the other dignitaries. Ye would be the exception that spoilt the municipal gallery. Turtle daily would not help you, Dick. It comes of your Oriental wanderings. In the manewhile, let me introjuce you to Mr. Maxhaven, of Philadelphia. This, Mr. Maxhaven, is one of our young but promising explorers, Faviel by name, wondering, as ye can see for yourself, if the day will ever come that they’ll make him a fatted mayor. It will not——”

“ Confound you, O’Levin!” said Faviel, in reply, as he shook hands with the long American to whom he was thus most unceremoniously introduced. “ How d’vou do, sir?”

"I am very pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr. Faviel," returned Mr. Maxhaven politely.

"Though the pleasure is altogether discounted, and your nose put out of joint by the fact that I've just been introjucing Mr. Maxhaven to Miss Mallendon wandering all forlorn. He has not looked at a picture since, and ye cannot expect that he will look at you," said O'Levin. He was an old friend of Faviel's, and a journalist, and it was a question among those who knew him whether his tongue or his pen went faster.

"I find art exceedingly interesting," said Mr. Maxhaven seriously. "And it is the first time I have visited your British Royal Academy. Exploration is also one of my fortes. Truly, however, the young lady to whom Mr. O'Levin was good enough to introduce me in the other room, is very attractive——"

"What room did you say?" asked Faviel. At any other time he would have been happy to listen to O'Levin, and he liked American visitors. But it struck him that a possible opportunity had come his way that should not be neglected.

"Room III. She's been around, she said——"

"Excuse me, won't you, O'Levin? I'm in an awful hurry. Hope you'll bring Mr. Maxhaven to see me—to-morrow or next day, or——"

"Lord!" said O'Levin, as Faviel, without completing his sentence, posted in the direction of Room III., "I have never seen that young man in such a tearing hurry before. Will he be wanting to kill an R.A., do you think?"

"Your English explorers," said Mr. Maxhaven solemnly, "would seem to have a kindly eye for the picturesque."

CHAPTER II

STERN CHASE THROUGH BURLINGTON HOUSE

THE thing that struck Mr. Faviel most about Burlington House during the next quarter of an hour was its wonderful construction. The cunning way in which the rooms led out of one another was quite remarkable; by making a careful reconnaissance of the room you were approaching, you could, without entering it, make pretty sure that the persons you did not want to meet were going out the other end. If they were not doing so, you yourself could go back a little and look at a picture which was quite worthy of attention, though you had neglected it previously.

"I'm sure we looked at that before," said Miss Mallendon positively, when Mr. Faviel had drawn her back to point out one of these masterpieces, not for the first time.

"But it's worth it, don't you think? Such splendid broad treatment. Look at the sheep and the clouds! Quite one of the coming men—the fellow who painted it."

"What is his name?"

"Er—Brown—F. C. Brown." Mr. Faviel invented the name with admirable glibness. Having the advantage of height, he had just seen, across the tops of the people, the figures of Lady Mallendon and Blenkenstein rising to continue the search for his companion. Lady Mallendon had evidently called a halt

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from sheer fatigue, but she was up again now, and disappearing in the distance at a rapid pace, apparently under the impression that she had seen the object of her chase.

"Yes. Brown's an open-air man. Paints in Norfolk, I believe," said Faviel, with a sigh of relief.

"Where does A. R. Cummersley paint?" asked Miss Mallendon.

"Who?"

"A. R. Cummersley. The catalogue says he painted the clouds and sheep picture. I suppose it's a misprint?"

"Oh, not at all," said Faviel promptly. "My mistake—stupid of me. Brown's somewhere else. Shall we go on to the next room?"

"And look for Mr. Brown's picture?"

"It's quite worth looking at," said Faviel unabashed.

"I should like to see it. Why is it they haven't got his name down at all, if he's exhibiting?"

There was humor in Miss Judith Mallendon's gray eyes, but what sort of humor Faviel could not tell. He would have given more than a penny for her thoughts, which were hidden from him. It was this quality of reserve in her—which Lady Mallendon had remarked on—that had kept Faviel from wanting to find out too exactly what she thought of him, that had kept him back for the last six months when he had fancied he knew exactly what he thought of her, and that kept him back now when he had determined that he must find out for good or for bad, seeing that some one else had started up who—from what Faviel knew of him—would not be backward.

He liked the reserve—indeed it increased his ad-

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miration for her—but there was no denying that it amounted to an obstacle at the present moment. Perhaps if he had much to offer her besides himself, he would not have hesitated, being by nature prompt and impetuous, and not afraid to put his fortune to the touch. But he was aware that from a worldly point of view he had nothing to confer; and he was not aware what value he was justified in attaching to that solitary item—himself. It all depended upon what she thought, and that was what he did not know.

He was not even sure what she would think of him when she found out the way in which he had circumvented the others in the matter of their present companionship. He had come on her—quite unexpectedly—in Room III., according to Mr. Maxhaven's directions, and she had only been mildly curious as to where she should find her aunt. Blenkenstein had not been mentioned. They were supposed to be walking round until Lady Mallendon should turn up.

What would happen then, Faviel had hitherto succeeded in trying not to think. Meantime, he had to extricate himself from the pit into which his too great readiness had plunged him. He had not contemplated her looking at the catalogue for the artists' names. Not that a small thing like this disconcerted him.

"It's my absurd memory," he said. "Now that I come to think of it——"

"Yes?"

"Brown's picture is at the New Gallery. It's a pity, isn't it? The goats are so uncommonly well painted."

"The sheep, you mean."

"The sheep, of course."

Mallendon's eyes twinkled into laughter.

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"And now," she said, "can you tell me why we came back to look at this picture which isn't Mr. Brown's, but somebody else's?"

"I can," said Faviel. "But I'd rather not, for the simple reason that I want to talk about something else." He fancied that he had got started, mistakenly. If only she had looked as if she expected the importance of his declaration. She didn't.

"Something interesting?" she asked.

"Lady Mallendon was talking to me about your ideal," said Faviel, trying to stick to his point.

"What did she say my ideal was?"

"A strenuous man—who does things, and pulls strings"—her coolness had made Mr. Faviel ironical. She looked at him curiously.

"They're rather like Aunt Georgy's expressions," she said, nodding. "I am not sure that she isn't right. If I were a man, I should love power. I suppose that is what pulling the strings means?"

"I suppose that is what Lady Mallendon meant

"Not what you mean?"

She might, he thought, have shown a little more eagerness in asking him what his ideals were. She was wondering if he was the idler her aunt had hinted at once or twice of late—since Mr. Blenkenstein had made her acquaintance. He was not as deferential as Mr. Blenkenstein, and she rather liked that. Except that of course it was a compliment for a man of importance to be deferential to a girl of no importance whatever.

"I'm awfully bad at ideals," was Faviel's answer.

"Are you?" She seemed to be summing him up—a trying process for the person representing the sum.

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"And I dislike some of the people I've met who pull strings. By the way"—Faviel quite lost his usual serenity at this point, she looked so calm—"Lady Mallendon also said that your ideal had promised to——"

Her cheeks went pink in a moment then.

"I mean," he said apologetically, "Lady Mallendon was saying that you and she were expecting to meet some one here this morning."

They were at the moment advancing for the fourth time into Room V., and Miss Mallendon paused to examine a landscape that was wedged in among some larger pictures. She had to stoop to see it properly. When she had done, her cheeks were of a normal color.

"We were expecting Mr. Blenkenstein," she said. "Aunt Georgy says that he pulls strings—in the City—finance. I don't know what finance is exactly. Aunt Georgy thinks a great deal of him——"

"And you?"

"I—I think——"

"My dear Judith, where have you been?"

Lady Mallendon broke in, worn and worried-looking, upon the answer for which Faviel had been waiting more eagerly than he ever remembered to have waited for anything.

"And Mr. Faviel?" she said, with great displeasure. "I thought when I left you that you understood I was looking for my niece. I imagined that you were going yourself. In any case, it would have been kind to have informed Judith that Mr. Blenkenstein and I were looking for her."

"The fact is," said Faviel, conscious that his case was a bad one and only partially solaced by the

Stern Chase Through Burlington House 15

menacing glare in Blenkenstein's eye—"Burlington House is built wrong. I met Miss Mallendon, as I was going to the entrance, and we've been walking round—after you—ever since. It's like a labyrinth——"

"What I wish to know is," said Lady Mallendon with dignity, "did you tell Judith that Mr. Blenkenstein and I——"

Faviel's luck was with him to some extent after all, for at that moment O'Levin and his long American friend completed the group.

"Lady Mallendon—by all that's pleasurable, and me friend, Blink—not to mention Faviel and Miss Mallendon whom we've met before. The pick of London, Maxhaven, I assure ye. Lady Mallendon, may I introjuce Mr. Maxhaven of Philadelphia——?"

Lady Mallendon composed her ruffled plumes for the purpose of the introduction, and O'Levin continued:

"It's what in novels they call a coincidence that we should have met in front of the picture of the year. Ye see it?" He indicated a large classical canvas on the wall opposite, a "Perseus and Andromeda."

"Fine rich coloring," said Mr. Maxhaven, since no one else volunteered a criticism.

"It should be," said O'Levin. "For why? That picture, Lady Mallendon, is by a plumber. 'Tis the only picture by a plumber that's ever been known to art, and the young man who painted it is only a plumber in a small way. What's more, we interviewed him in the 'Drum' the other day, and his fame is now assured whichever side of his janius he develops. A countess has commissioned him to paint her portrait, and two dowager dukes, or I should say, duchesses,

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have invited him to mend leaks in their gas-pipes. The modestest young fellow he is, too, and ready to tell ye how his old master (for he was apprenticed) used to knock him on the head for stealing putty to model with."

"What a dreadful thing!" said Lady Mallendon, who was chafing to be at lunch.

"He bears the marks still," said O'Levin, with relish. "'Perseus and Andromeda,' I may tell ye, occurred to him when he was taking up the floor of a dining-room in Ealing, to see why the bath water leaked. The pipes were not there at all, but he was so wrapped up with the pothry of the idea for his picture that he went on, unconscious, taking up the floor, with the result that when the owner of the house returned in the evening there was nothing but air to walk on. However, it was the first step to success, for his master turned him off—turned the young janius on to the streets."

"Dear, dear," said Lady Mallendon. "I was about to ask Mr. Faviel——"

"Then he sold matches. Afterwards——" O'Levin having got into his swing would not be denied the telling of the whole story, thereby enabling Faviel to escape unexamined. If, however, he could have followed the workings of Mr. Blenkenstein's brain, Faviel would have known that his morning's work was even less satisfactory—to himself—than it appeared on the surface. And it did not appear on the surface in the smallest degree satisfactory.

CHAPTER III

INTRODUCING MR. WILTON

"Most extraordinary and inexcusable!"

That is how Lady Mallendon characterized Mr. Faviel's conduct, after cross-examining Judith, who apparently could not explain it at all.

"Never to have informed you that Mr. Blenkenstein and I were looking for you everywhere? That is what surprises me."

"It is funny," said Judith, "isn't it?"

"It almost looks," Lady Mallendon argued, "as though he had been annoyed by my getting up to go round with Mr. Blenkenstein. Young men seem to think themselves of such importance nowadays that I shouldn't be at all surprised if that had vexed him. Still, even if he were vexed, he had no right to retaliate by keeping you in ignorance of the fact that Mr. Blenkenstein and I——"

"Certainly not," said Judith hurriedly.

"And, in fact, I call it impertinent of Mr. Faviel. I am rather sorry that I sent invitations to him and his friend for the 'At Home' on the 29th, for really I shall not feel at all pleased to see him for some time. I cannot withdraw the invitations, but I shall certainly be out if he calls in the meantime. So will you, Judith."

"Yes, Aunt Georgy."

"To think that he should have allowed Mr. Blenkenstein and me——"

"Yes, Auntie," said Judith, and beat a retreat.

She could not explain to Lady Mallendon, or, indeed, to any one, why Mr. Faviel had behaved in the way he had. She did not herself know for certain. An original minded young woman, brought up in an old-fashioned style, she was at once older and younger than her years; a queer mixture of determination and docility. In this case, her docile side made her willing to accept Lady Mallendon's maxims, about the praiseworthiness and desirability of an energetic career—and therefore of Mr. Blenkenstein—as indisputable. Mr. Blenkenstein was, without doubt, a man to admire.

Why, then, Judith asked herself in the privacy of her own room, why did she like Mr. Faviel? Why was she not vexed by what had occurred in Burlington House? Why would she have liked more to know what Mr. Faviel had been going to say to her there than she would have liked to know what Mr. Blenkenstein was going to say to her—so far as she could judge—not very long hence?

Perhaps it was the uncertainty of what he had been going to say that made her eager for it. Perhaps—a score of perhapses presented themselves to her mind, but she ended by deciding that she ought to think that Lady Mallendon was right. If she were not right, circumstances would contradict her. Circumstances or Mr. Faviel. If there were more in him than Lady Mallendon supposed, the fact of their being out when he called would not deter him. He might not call.

Faviel did call, and was rather annoyed to learn that Lady Mallendon was not in. Such a coincidence as a lady being out when her servant announces the fact, is not impossible. But then he also met the

Mallendons at the house of a mutual friend, was treated by Lady Mallendon with a coolness that must have cost her a fever of preliminary practice, and had not a chance of talking with Judith. He also understood that Blenkenstein had become a frequent and favored guest at the Mallendons' house.

These things working together ruffled even Faviel's serenity—which had become quite a byword among his friends—and seriously perplexed Lieutenant Tod Wilton, R.E., at present home from Egypt, and stopping with Faviel, as he always did when he had the chance. Faviel had been the hero and friend of Mr. Wilton's schooldays, and continued to be, in that young officer's opinion, the most brilliant and admirable mortal that a man ever had for friend. Faviel perturbed was a spectacle Mr. Wilton had never contemplated, though he had seen—at various periods—Faviel tree'd by a farmer's dogs and men; Faviel birched by his head master; Faviel invited to fight a duel (in German days); Faviel started, at an increasing pace, down an ice slope in the Himalayas; and various other Faviels in difficulties which would upset the ordinary man. It added to Mr. Wilton's perplexity that he could not find out any adequate reason for Faviel's perturbation. He understood vaguely that a certain Miss Mallendon had attracted Faviel's attention, but he merely supposed that Miss Mallendon (whom he had not seen) would know herself to be, what in his—Tod's—opinion she certainly would be, namely, a very lucky girl, if Faviel's attentions resulted in what attentions do occasionally result in—a proposal.

It was not until the evening of the day before Lady Mallendon's At Home—at which Wilton understood

he was to have the honor of seeing Miss Mallendon—that Faviel enlightened him at all in regard to this matter. Then, as they were dressing for a dinner which was to be given by O'Levin at his rooms in honor of his own recent appointment to the editorship of the "Drum"—a journal proudly and lucidly described by its new conductor as "the Earliest Evening Paper in the World"—Faviel began to talk.

"It's rather lucky," he said, "that we got the Mallendon invitations a fortnight ago."

"Why?"

"Mightn't have got them at all if we hadn't."

Wilton pressed for an explanation.

"I'm not in good odor with Lady Mallendon," said Faviel. "She's very jolly, but she has a financier in her eye as a nephew-in-law, and I played him a trick the other day—since when I have become non-existent for Lady Mallendon." He related the incident of the Academy. Wilton's opinion of Lady Mallendon fell to a very low ebb.

"I don't see that it mattered," he said. "And I should have thought you were as good as a financier."

"I'm more virtuous than J. D. Blenkenstein, who is, in fact, rather a rogue. Did I ever tell you how I made his acquaintance?"

"No."

Faviel related that incident also. It seemed that on his return from some Eastern travels he had been asked by Blenkenstein, whom he did not know, to speak in favor of some mines, which, he gathered, were owned by a company directed, and possibly owned in its turn, by Blenkenstein.

"I happened to have inspected the mines. Quite

deep mines, but nothing in them. Blenkenstein seemed to think that the substitution of the word 'valuable' for 'deep' was a simple matter. I suggested that a simpler way of arranging any difficulty there might be would be for me to kick him downstairs. However, he rang his bell then and had in a bevy of clerks, so that we had to compromise the matter by parting in mutual wrath."

"And Lady Mallendon wants him for her niece?" said Wilton, in disgust.

"Well, she doesn't know him. Besides, he may be a model of private virtue. Business is a thing apart nowadays. He's a great man."

"You'll get the Burah consulate probably."

It had been hinted to Faviel from what are known as influential quarters that the Foreign Office was seriously considering the question of whether they might not make a step forward and appoint the most competent man they could find, instead of a favored nonentity, to this not unimportant office. The decision was to be made some time in the course of the next three months.

"I don't know that I've got enough to justify me in accepting it, even if they offer it me," Faviel said. "More kicks than ha'pence at Burah, and it doesn't make one great to be consul there."

"It's better than swindling in the City."

"Lady Mallendon can't know that."

"But you don't propose to marry Lady Mallendon?" Tod urged.

"No. I propose to marry Judith Mallendon," said Faviel. "But I don't at the present moment see how I'm going to do it. Have to shoot Blenkenstein first, I expect."

Tod's opinion of Miss Judith Mallendon also fell to a low ebb at this point. She might be beautiful, but she could hardly, he said to himself, have much intelligence if Blenkenstein stood to her for a possible husband.

CHAPTER IV

THE WAGER

It struck Tod Wilton, from the very first moment that he heard the man whom Faviel and he had been discussing was expected at O'Levin's that night, that something dramatic was bound to happen. The question was, what form the drama would assume.

O'Levin, who did not know more than that Blenkenstein and Faviel had had some disagreement at one time or another, greeted them on the threshold with the news that he had invited Blenkenstein. He was apologetic about it.

"'Tis yourself that reminds me," he said to Faviel, as soon as they had shaken hands. "I knew in a sort of double-sighted way that there was going to be something wrong with the meal to-night, and 'twouldn't be the wine, for I bought it at an auction, and if it isn't good, it's cheap, as the auctioneer said after I'd bought it, bad cess to 'um! 'Tis that I've invited Blenkenstein—J. D. Blenkenstein—and now, seeing your merry face, it tears through me mimory that you and he hate each other like cats."

"Do you want me to go?" Faviel asked, stacking his hat and coat the while.

"No. I'd sooner kick Blink downstairs, though 'twouldn't be hospitable in the best sinse of the word, and the damages I'd have to pay for injuring a bucket-shop king 'ud ruin the 'Drum.' I wouldn't have ye

go for worlds. But that's just it. Would ye mind, now, putting up with him for the evening?"

"Not a bit."

O'Levin breathed a breath of mock relief.

"You don't think," Faviel asked, "that he'll mind putting up with me?"

"Not he," said O'Levin. "Blink's a Christian, as far as forgiving the enemies he's made is concerned. And he likes to be glared at. It makes him feel great. Indeed, now that I come to think of it, I remember I told him you were coming, and he looked as pleased as Midas before his ears went gold."

It was not easy to see the steadfast facts through O'Levin's volubility, but it seemed to Mr. Wilton, when he considered the matter later, that whether Blenkenstein had foreseen his particular opportunity in the dinner or not, he had probably come to pick a quarrel, and O'Levin might not have been unaware of it. The Irishman loved a joke or a quarrel. As it turned out, the re-introduction of Blenkenstein to Faviel passed off comparatively smoothly.

"I believe you know Faviel," O'Levin had said; "or Faviel knows you."

"Ah, yes; I know Mr. Faviel," said Blenkenstein. "Don't fancy I've seen you, though, for some time." He had a heavy, patronizing manner, in direct contrast to Faviel's easy gaiety.

"I thought I saw you at the Academy the other day, with Lady Mallendon," was the answer Blenkenstein got.

"I didn't know you knew the Mallendons," said Blenkenstein ironically.

"Not well enough to dictate their friends to them."

Some one prevented the interchange of further amenities by admiring a new picture on the walls.

"It ought to be genuine," said O'Levin; "I got it at the same auction as the wine. And I had a towel-horse thrown in—all for seven pounds tin."

Mr. Maxhaven, who was one of the guests, murmured something about his doctor's bills, and dinner was announced. It proceeded amicably enough at first. The "Drum," coupled with the name of its new editor, was toasted, and O'Levin thanked the company on behalf of that "sweet little rag."

Galton, an artist, who had been at the same school as O'Levin, Wilton and Faviel, complained of the size of the print, and O'Levin promptly started a theory that all artists were astigmatic.

"They don't see double, like journalists, at any rate," said Galton.

Mr. Wilton, back from comparative exile, listened with pleasure. The repartee reminded him of his schooldays, and he said so, which brought the others down on him in a body—with reminiscences. Faviel recalled that Galton had always been celebrated for inkstains on his fingers.

"He puts them on paper now, and calls himself an artist," said O'Levin. "D'ye remember Faviel's ode on the occasion of Topsy leading Mrs. Topsy to the altar?" They all remembered the famous composition—in the heroic style—ending with the lines:—

"Ten years round Ilium strove the valorous Greeks:
The Rev. Turvey won his Helen in ten weeks."

It had been presented with good intent to the Rev. Adolphus Turvey on his return to school at the end of the summer holidays with a wife, but for some

reason it was considered an impertinence. Faviel had been caned for it.

"One of the rare occasions when ye were," said O'Levin. "Ye always had the luck."

"Is that so?" said Blenkenstein. He had been listening with the face of a man who has to tolerate conversation to which he is supremely indifferent, and his interjection at this point was nearly provocative. The subject, however, that actually roused the discord which Wilton had somehow expected from the first was started later.

Some one—and Wilton could not have said for certain who—mentioned a case of disappearance, one of those curious cases in which a man, without warning or apparent motive, goes out of this world once and for all, leaving no trace. Wilton rather fancied that it was O'Levin's American friend, Maxhaven, who began insisting on the mystery generally noticeable in these cases. Faviel agreed.

"The police are often blamed," he said. "But it seems to me——"

"Very properly too!" Blenkenstein's words were a distinct interruption.

"But it seems to me, I was going to say," Faviel proceeded with his usual serenity—"that to blame the police in such cases is rather too easy a way. There are hundreds of cases—every one can guess at them—in which you cannot keep official scrutiny on the private person."

Blenkenstein leant across the table.

"You don't think our detective service a farce?"

Apart from the deliberately disagreeable way in which he thrust the question at Faviel, any one might have been annoyed at having an interesting topic so

unintelligently squashed. It was like a horse-laugh to a philosopher delicately theorizing—a thing that makes it rather difficult for a philosopher to retain his philosophy. It roused Faviel.

"They don't catch every one they ought to," he said.

"What do you mean?" Blenkenstein rapped out. "I don't understand you."

"No?"

Faviel began to peel a walnut. It was plain enough to every one present that what had been a general topic had become a personal one, and that two of O'Levin's guests were prepared to quarrel. O'Levin himself looked unhappy.

"Well, me boys," he began, in his most practised brogue (he was a Cockney Irishman, and had been at some pains to acquire the right inflection), "if you was to ask me, I'd say——"

But Blenkenstein was not to be denied.

"I understand that Mr. Faviel and I differ about this point. I don't say anything about Mr. Faviel's way of arguing. It's not my style. All I want to know is whether Mr. Faviel would go a little further and back his opinion."

"Any one of them," said Faviel. "I don't quite see, though, how we're going to prove Scotland Yard a farce, even by a wager?"

"Oh, I don't know," said O'Levin, relieved by the notion that nothing worse was coming off than a wager. "I could set a Missing Competition—for detectives only—in the 'Drum.' Be jabbers, 'tisn't such a stale notion. First prize, a silver-plated truncheon. Second prize, 'The Soul's Awakening.' Framed complete."

Blenkenstein forced a smile.

"I take it," he said, "that the difference between Mr. Faviel and myself is that he thinks it an easy matter to disappear, and I don't. I say the detective who can't run down a man who's disappeared is a fool. See? Well, the wager I've got in my mind is this—I'd back myself to trace any man who likes to vanish within a month."

"That's sporting," said O'Levin.

"And the man might be Mr. Faviel, if he really fancied it."

Here was the point at which, if Wilton was right in supposing that Blenkenstein had deliberately tried to foist a wager on Faviel, he could point to some marks of evidence. The test Blenkenstein had suggested was not obviously the outcome of Faviel's argument. It was not in any way a fair deduction from it. On the other hand, it sounded distinctly a sporting challenge.

Coming as it did on the top of a personal difference, it clearly appealed to the company. A glance round showed that Faviel's answer was awaited with interest. Faviel himself did not glance round, but finished peeling his walnut.

"What would the stakes be?" he asked.

Blenkenstein seemed to understand the sort of man he was dealing with.

"Oh, I never bother myself about a thing unless I stand to win something respectable."

"So I've heard."

"I dare say you wouldn't fancy it," said Blenkenstein, rather quicker. "Not less than five thousand."

"How much more?"

"Another five."

"Done!" said Faviel, and Mr. Wilton found himself swiftly and suddenly doing mental arithmetic. From what he knew of his friend's affairs, ten thousand pounds would represent the chief part of his possessions. He stood to lose it to that sneering brute, and make a fool of himself into the bargain. What was he saying?

"Did you get the walnuts with the towel-horse, O'Levin?"

"I did not," said O'Levin, made curt by sheer admiration. He also was thinking—as his next words showed—of the size of the stakes.

"Ye've turned my humble apartments between ye into a kind of Crockford's. I'll be raided by the police. Ten thousand pounds! Ye'd better be making it a pony now. A pony's a homelier and more reasonable sum."

So Wilton thought, and would have said, but that it would have looked like helping his friend out of a tight place. Faviel would have been annoyed. And, indeed, there was obviously nothing to be done. The rest of the guests, pleased with the importance of a wager in which they had no concern, and being mostly young men, offered no dissuasions. On the contrary, they resolved themselves very readily into a court of honor to decide the rules which should govern the wager.

CHAPTER V

MR. BLENKENSTEIN EFFECTS A COMPROMISE WITH HIS CONSCIENCE

At three o'clock precisely on the afternoon following there presented himself at the Inquiry Office of the Capital Cities Exchange, Ltd., a middle-aged man whose appearance, suggesting at one and the same time the gravity of a highly respectable butler and the laxness of a Bookie, over whom clouds have rolled, might have left even a keen observer in ignorance of his vocation in life. A keen observer might, however, have noticed that it was the clothes of the middle-aged man which suggested the butler, whereas a humorous leer and a certain weakness of the legs brought up reminiscences of the less weighty profession.

He inquired, in a voice of which the huskiness could not conceal the affability, if Mr. Blenkenstein was in.

The youth, whose business it was to answer such inquiries, but whose occupation at the moment it was to look for signs of a coming mustache in a small and cheaply-made pocket-mirror, threw a dignified glance at the inquirer.

"What name?" he said, in a tone that showed he was going further than he generally went in noting the middle-aged man's name.

"Mr. Boke," said the middle-aged man.

"Queer sort of name," said the youth. "Can't possibly see Mr. Blenkenstein to-day, Boke——"

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"Not?"

"No."

The youth returned to his mirror, as though Mr. Boke had served his purpose, and no longer remained within his sphere. The fact that Mr. Boke did not immediately retire was not—it seemed—a matter of surprise to him, or in any way worthy of his attention. People often waited a little like that—one would guess—after hearing that adamant refusal from his lips. Eventually, they got tired, and went away.

Mr. Boke might be getting tired, but that eventuality did not occur to him. The youth glancing up at the end of another course of self-investigation found Mr. Boke's eyes fixed upon him in a genial way.

"And how many can you count?" asked Mr. Boke, in his affable voice.

"Look here," said the youth, pinkly wroth, "what do you mean, eh?"

"It should be simple arithmetic," said Mr. Boke, undeterred by the ferocious tone of the question, "and a sharp young fellow like you ought to be able to tot 'em up pretty quick. I'm not in what you could call the deuce of a hurry, and I can wait till you've got the answer, put it down on an invoice, and addressed it to your mother. Then—I shall be glad to see Mr. Blenkenstein—and——"

"Go to the——"

"Sh-sh! Naughty!" said Mr. Boke. "*And*—as I was going on to say when your young jaws let slip the word Jerusalem—or whatever it might ha' been—*and* Mr. Blenkenstein—being, so far as I am acquainted with him, of a punctual disposition—will be glad to see me. It's an appointment, sonny. So don't

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stop to tell me what you'd like to say if you was the Prince of Wales, but run!"

Something in the inflection of Mr. Boke's voice—which was, however, as affable as ever—warned the youth that he was not dealing with the ordinary inquirer. Crestfallen, and without waiting for more remarks, he plunged out of the glass box in which he had hitherto been preserved, and scuttled along the corridor on the right.

He returned shortly, to say that Mr. Blenkenstein would see Mr. Boke at once. Would Mr. Boke come this way?

"Mr. Boke 'll try," said that gentleman. "Totter along, Augustus."

Thus urged, the youth conducted Mr. Boke to the sumptuous room in which Mr. Blenkenstein was in the habit of—as Lady Mallendon had phrased it with a not imprudent vagueness—"pulling strings." Mr. Blenkenstein was walking up and down it somewhat restlessly, a thing that did not escape Mr. Boke's notice, for having already become entirely the respected butler in facial expression, he showed further powers of adaptation to environment by saying in a voice, only slightly hoarse and entirely deferential:—

"I was very pleased, sir, to be in when your message came round. Anything that you may trust to me, Mr. Blenkenstein, I take the liberty to say is worth doing."

"Ah—well, take a chair, Boke. Do you smoke? Have a cigar."

Mr. Boke accepted a cigar, it being his motto never to lose a chance, with some inward surprise. In the direction of such little jobs as Mr. Blenkenstein had previously employed him for, concerned mostly with moneys overdue and reputations overdrawn, that gen-

tleman had never thought it worth while to be particularly gracious or condescending. It was not his habit in dealing with his inferiors, and there was, he opined, little to be gained by it. But in employing Boke for a present comparatively private and social end, Blenkenstein had decided that—since he would probably have in any case to be confidential—he might as well go further, and instruct Boke in a friendly way.

“Like that cigar, eh? Good? It ought to be. I gave sixty shillings a hundred for ’em. Well, about this job. I may as well tell you at once, Boke,” said Blenkenstein, rendered a little fussy by reason of having to be so unusually gracious, “it’s a private matter. You’ll be acting for me personally, not for the Company. The fact is, I’ve got a wager on.”

“With a friend, sir?”

“Yes—no.”

“With a gentleman, I should say, perhaps, with whom you have no business relations——”

“That’s it,” said Blenkenstein, unconscious of any irony in this definition of friendship. “A man I know has betted me that he’ll disappear for a month without my being able to track him. There’s a good deal of money on it.” Blenkenstein came to an uneasy standstill. “What do you think his chances are, Boke?”

Mr. Boke had got out a flat, soiled notebook.

“If he hasn’t had much of a start, sir, his chances are, I may say, *nil*. Name and address of the gentleman, if you please. Habits, if you know them. Terms of the wager.”

Mr. Boke rattled off the heads of his requirements with a professional gusto, and became aware at the

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end of it that Blenkenstein's attention had wandered. He was looking at the wall opposite, revolving many things. One was a regret that Faviel hadn't started yet. He had regretted that ever since he had realized how it would have simplified things.

Only after he had made the wager had the full beauty of the opportunities it opened up been revealed to him. He had gone to O'Levin's dinner wishing all manner of evil to Faviel; he had always hated the fellow ever since that affair of the mines. But he had never before seen a chance of getting back on him. He had not seen it there even, until the wager had been actually made. Despite Wilton's suspicions, he had made the wager on the spur of the moment, as a matter of provocation. He had meant to provoke Faviel, and though he had not started the conversation about people who disappear, he had realized at once that to contradict Faviel was to score a point. The wager had followed almost equally without forethought. He had merely meant Faviel to feel how small a person he was in comparison with himself—Blenkenstein—in a matter where Money counted. He had never for a moment supposed either that Faviel had the money to stake or the coolness to stake it.

The very instant the wager had been made, however, he had perceived some of the possibilities to which it might lead. One of them was Faviel's pecuniary ruin. The other, more important and far more desirable in Blenkenstein's eyes, was his undoing in the matter of his relations with Judith Mallendon.

Blenkenstein's perceptions were not of the finest, but he understood vaguely that Miss Mallendon was for some reason best known to herself holding the balance between himself and Faviel. The fellow

had some attraction for her, and she could not see that he was a waster. At least she could not see it plainly enough to make up her mind to say good-by to him. She had her suspicions of him of course. Lady Mallendon had seen to that—with his assistance. Queer old thing—Lady Mallendon—muddle-headed of course, but quite right in admiring finance and financiers, though she knew no more about them than she did about flying—absolutely right in regarding Faviel as a waster. Blenkenstein was not particularly given to moral fervors, but he really did fervidly consider Faviel a waster. A man who spent his time wandering about unknown countries, and when he got a chance of making money for himself and other people—as in the case of that mine—chucked it away for a silly scruple. Bah—the thought of it sickened Blenkenstein. Life was too short for such fooleries and such fools—— And yet this fool was his rival—and a formidable one. He was conscious of not having made much progress in the last fortnight. But, supposing Faviel could be got out of the way for a month, even at the cost of ten thousand pounds, the balance would surely incline to him—Blenkenstein. A wooer at home is worth a dozen wooers whose whereabouts are totally unknown, especially if the latter are already suspected of instability. The wooer at home, moreover, has every chance of justifying to the lady the suspicions she already entertains of the absent rival.

That was why he had urged upon the Committee that they should so arrange the wager that, firstly, Faviel should start at once—within the hour—and that, secondly, the whole affair should be treated as confidential, no one outside the Committee being ad-

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mitted to know of it until it was decided one way or the other.

Faviel had stood out against both these suggestions, but the latter had been decided by the Committee in Blenkenstein's favor. None of the men present guessed all that lay behind the wager, and no doubt they had thought it simpler to keep the matter to themselves. Faviel clearly could not explain to them exactly why he would rather the thing were not kept a secret; or thought he could not explain; or didn't think it out at all. Blenkenstein had reckoned on winning this point, and he had reckoned right.

On the other hand, the framers of the rules had decided that Faviel was entitled to some delay, and Blenkenstein, in his turn, could not very easily explain why he was in such a hurry for Faviel to disappear. It was arranged finally that he should disappear at ten o'clock the night following, and be given a two hours' start. In other words, he was due to vanish at ten to-night, and not to have the chase begun after him until twelve.

It meant on the one hand that he would be at the Mallendons'—see Judith—possibly propose to her: on the other, that he would have every opportunity of getting away. Boke even now was suggesting that every minute's start made an almost vital difference to the chances.

A sense of having been unjustly treated by the arbiters of the wager began to overcome Blenkenstein. He wanted to behave in a sportsmanlike way; he admired the sporting spirit outside business matters. He would have been willing to lose that very considerable sum—ten thousand pounds—to Faviel, a man who had, by the way, insulted him. But he was not pre-

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pared to lose both the money and Judith Mallendon to the fellow. Sportsmanship was all very well, but——

"Every minute, sir, I might say, is a day to the other gentleman," Boke was saying again.

"Wait a bit," said Blenkenstein, collecting his faculties; "he hasn't started yet, you know."

"That's a pity for the gentleman," said Mr. Boke, rubbing his hands.

"And I happen to know he won't attempt it till ten to-night. What's more"—Blenkenstein wore an air of supreme magnanimity—"it's a sporting matter, as I've said, and I want to give him a start."

"I see, sir."

"At least," Blenkenstein corrected himself, "I'd like to if we can afford it." A plan had just come into his head. If he could ascertain that Faviel had not advantaged himself by going to the Mallendons, in that case he could afford to observe the spirit of the rules—what some people would call the letter of them—and let him have the two hours' start. Boke could be on the watch, somewhere outside the Mallendons' house; and a signal showing him how to proceed could easily be agreed on. If he could not ascertain how far Faviel had succeeded with Judith, Boke would have to follow at once. But—and here an inspiration came to Blenkenstein—in that case he must not allow Boke to arrest Faviel and present the letter which the Court had adjudicated was to be the test of Faviel's having lost the wager. Faviel must be encouraged to disappear, or rather to imagine that he had disappeared, while in reality all the time Boke would be keeping an eye on him. Thus he would be out of the way and yet supervised.

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An hour later Mr. Boke, with alternative instructions fully jotted down in his fat notebook, withdrew thoughtfully from Mr. Blenkenstein's room. Blenkenstein had not explained precisely what the terms of the wager were; he did not believe in being over-confidential. But he had impressed upon Mr. Boke that he was absolutely decided to act in the matter in the most sportsmanlike way in the world.

"Always remembering, of course, Boke, that it is we who are going to win this wager."

"Quite so, sir, exactly," Mr. Boke had said, admiringly, with his hand on the door. Once he had closed the door, Mr. Boke winked, slowly and disrespectfully, at the vacant corridor, before proceeding down it towards the inquiry office and exit.

The youth still sat in the glass box in which Mr. Boke's personality had first been revealed to him.

"Any more sprouted since I see you?" queried Mr. Boke, as he passed by. "Not? Lay you two to one you'll grow another before you're a year older. Won't take it? Why, a lad with boots as tight and shiny as yours ought to be more of a sportsman; still it ain't to be wondered at," continued Mr. Boke, as he passed out of the youth's hearing into the thronged and noisy street, "sportsmen and Mr. B. wouldn't somehow fancy working in the same office."

CHAPTER VI

LADY MALLENDON'S AT HOME

"HULLO, Sir J.!"

"Eh, what? Jim! What are you doing here?"

Sir Jasper Mallendon, who had just come down into the hall preparatory to receiving his guests on the night of his wife's At Home, looked, as indeed he was, decidedly astonished to see his son and heir, whom he supposed to be at school some forty miles away, standing there in a well-cut dinner-jacket, and nonchalantly smoking a cigarette.

"I thought you were at Rapley," continued Sir Jasper in a voice that he tried to make indicative of displeasure, tugging at his tie the while. "Gug, gug, confound this tie! What's the meaning of it?"

Master Jimmy waved a hand at his father.

"I thought I'd taught you how to tie 'em by now," he said. "Otherwise I'd have come in and done it for you. You didn't roll on it before you roped it round, did you?"

"No, of course not," said Sir Jasper, abashed by this counter-attack upon an article of clothing which always remained a source of irritation to him, and surrendering himself meekly to his son's nimble fingers: "Something wrong with the make, I fancy."

"Rats," said Jimmy. "You won't take the trouble to learn how to do 'em, you know. That's what it is. There! It's hardly decent, but I suppose it'll do."

Glad mater's all right again. Of course I came up as soon as I got her letter, though Latters had the cheek to suggest it was a do, and wanted to make me promise to come back to-night. As though I could leave you two to get through this hop alone." Jimmy completed this offhand account of the reasons which had brought him up to Town with a prodigious wink.

"I've a good mind to send you," said Sir Jasper weakly. "You oughtn't to do it, Jimmy. Your mother only had a headache——"

"Well, she wrote," said Jimmy.

"You asked her to, I expect," said Sir Jasper.

"Never mind," said Jimmy. "I shall go up to-morrow morning. It's only French that I shall miss, and you know you never went in for that much yourself."

"I regret now that I didn't."

"You wouldn't be an ounce the better for it," said Jimmy consolingly. "So it's no good worrying. What sort of a lot are we having to-night?"

"I don't know," said Sir Jasper, without much animation. His wife's At Homes were usually something of a trial to him.

Lady Mallendon was a follower of what might be called the intellectual fashions. When Faviel had first made her acquaintance, some years back, on his return to England from an expedition, which, for a young man, was creditable and in its way unique, she had been a patroness of travelers and traveling. Explorers from the frozen north melted in Kidgrave Square and related adventures with Esquimaux dogs and Polar bears: Central African missionaries told of their experience with lions and cannibals, and felt glad to be alive, still in the sunshine of Lady Mallendon's smile.

Since then, however, the glass of fashion had been turned more than once. Art had had its day in Kidgrave Square; and so had music. Indeed, some of the very earliest English instruments had been re-introduced in Lady Mallendon's house, and, but for Sir Jasper's unaccountable distaste for music (developed after an attack of influenza), the lute and the harpsichord and the spinet might still have been heard there. As a rule, Sir Jasper never interfered with his lady's hobbies. In the City a solid pillar of shipping, our greatest industry, he was at home simply Lady Mallendon's admirer. She could do no wrong, or, at any rate, none—with the exception of playing the spinet—that Sir Jasper had the heart to interfere with. If he was not always interested in her enthusiasms he was almost always capable of enduring them. At times he would fly to his library and read through Horace's epistles, or take amateur photographs, but generally he could preserve his equanimity without artificial aid.

It was, however, a little threatened to-night. Though finance, in the person of Blenkenstein, promised to be Lady Mallendon's next hobby, sociology in its larger aspects and literature were the immediate attractions. Miss Robina Finch, for example, a poetess whom Lady Mallendon was housing while she learned to fly, and of whom much was expected (by Lady Mallendon) in the dramatic line, was to give recitations from her as yet unpublished works; and an old gentleman, who had studied with Karl Marx, had been invited to recount his reminiscences of that great reformer, in so far as an imperfect acquaintance with the English language would permit him. Sir Jasper prepared himself to be stoical accordingly. There was need of it.

He could not go off and fortify himself with ices, as Jimmy had done. He had to play the host. Wild-eyed men, who, if they had approached his office, would instantly have been warned of the proximity of the police, explained to him familiarly, and at length, why he ought to be an anarchist. Ladies, whose coiffures might be artistic, but suggested that they had traveled to Kidgrave Square on the back of a broomstick rather than in a cab or even an omnibus, commiserated him in a patronizing way upon his admitted ignorance of the works of M. Maeterlinck. In spite of every precaution, and an innate sense of the duties of hospitality, Sir Jasper was becoming a little gruff and irritable, when Lady Mallendon, in an innocent manner, and apparently quite incidentally, as she was passing him, said:—

“There’s Mr. Faviel. Why don’t you take him off, Jasper, to have some refreshment. You know you enjoy talking to him——”

“Yes, my dear, I do,” said Sir Jasper, and acted upon the hint.

It was in this way it came about that Faviel, who thought that he had at last seen an opportunity of approaching Miss Mallendon, from whom, by some conspiracy of fate, he had been so far sundered, was intercepted. He was actually hurrying across the room to where she sat on a sofa, a little battered by the guttural confidences of Karl Marx’s fellow-student, an ancient, ancient gentleman, whose lungs and admiration for lovely maidens were, however, still strong, and was caught midway.

“Glad to see you,” said Sir Jasper. “Confoundedly glad to see you. First sensible man I’ve come across to-night. I say—Oh, Lord!”

A lull at the far end of the room (during which Faviel, to his annoyance, saw Judith rise and be snapped up by a couple of shock-headed men—obviously revolutionists of a deep dye), followed by the mounting upon a temporary platform of a small but plump lady, whose self-possession in striking an attitude of wild and sudden woe was admirable in the extreme—accounted for Sir Jasper's exclamation.

"It's Miss Finch. She's going to recite," said Sir Jasper. "I say, Faviel, you don't want to stop and listen. Eh, what? A glass of champagne, better, eh?"

Miss Finch had just announced—"Geraniums, a Poem to my soldier lad;" and straightway began, in a piping voice—

"Geraniums! Geraniums!
Scarlet coats and the noise of drums!"

"A glass of champagne, better, eh?" repeated Sir Jasper in a fruity whisper, and led his victim from the room. A clock in the hall signified that the hour was already 10.25 P.M.

CHAPTER VII

MR. BLENKENSTEIN GIVES THE SIGNAL

REFERENCE has been made to the fact that Lady Mallendon prompted Sir Jasper to cut off Flaviel while on his way to Judith's side—in an apparently innocent manner. In reality, Lady Mallendon was feeling all the guilt and self-consciousness of a conspirator for the first time in her life. Besides all the duties of hostess, involving perpetual introductions, inspiritings of Miss Finch—who had threatened once or twice to lose her nerve before the time of her recitations arrived—and petitionings of Herr Münster not to talk himself hoarse before his turn should come to talk of Karl Marx, Lady Mallendon had taken it upon herself to prevent Faviel from having a *tête-à-tête* with her niece during the course of the evening. There was no conspiracy in the proper sense of the word, because the only conspirator—so to say—was Lady Mallendon. But as Lady Mallendon's ordinary self was as devoid of plottings as a bird or a lamb, the consciousness of having started to circumvent somebody made her feel quite sinister, besides giving her a headache.

She hoped that she was doing right, and assured herself at intervals that she was conspiring against Mr. Faviel for no personal reasons. This was true. At no time would her resentment at such a matter as Faviel's behavior in the Academy have lasted for very long; she had, indeed, quite got over it, greeting him

most warmly, somewhat to Faviel's own surprise, and being delighted to meet his friend, Mr. Wilton, of whom she had so often heard. She had, moreover, readily agreed to a proposal that Faviel made to her—apropos of a charity entertainment that she was getting up later on—when they should be in their country house, The Ashlands, that she should invite a very clever Chinese juggler of Faviel's acquaintance—at present in England looking for work—to go down and exhibit his tricks.

Lady Mallendon said that she would be delighted to employ Mr. Chy Fang, and only just pulled herself up in time from suggesting that Mr. Faviel should take part in the play at present being written by Miss Finch, which was to form the staple of the Ashlands fête. Why Lady Mallendon behaved in so friendly a way, why also she refrained from the invitation and proceeded with the conspiracy on a night fraught with events of an importance unknown to her—these things were all to be explained on the same ground.

Blenkenstein had hinted plainly a day or two before that Faviel was a competitor for Judith's hand. Lady Mallendon could forgive Mr. Faviel for having behaved so rudely, but she could not encourage him in an expectation which explained to some extent the rudeness. No, not for one moment could Lady Mallendon allow Mr. Faviel to suppose that her niece was to be sacrificed to a comparatively poor young man, without any settled profession, and with still less settled ambitions. As Judith's aunt she felt her duty plain.

Inasmuch, however, as feeling one's duty plain does not necessarily facilitate other people's seeing it with an equally lucid eye, or, in other words, since it isn't

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always easy to explain your own point of view to other people, Lady Mallendon had come to the conclusion that the simplest way out of the difficulty was to drop Mr. Faviel for the time being, but drop him after so kindly and so effusive a welcome to-night that his feelings could not possibly be hurt. Lady Mallendon phrased the conspiracy to herself as "the truest kindness."

The only difficulty was to make sure that Mr. Faviel, unaware of the benevolent plot raised against him, should not by some unexpected move make that plot of no avail; and it was a difficulty complicated by the fact that Lady Mallendon was, in her turn, unaware of the wager between Faviel and Blenkenstein. Had Faviel regarded the evening as a normal one, which might be renewed or supplemented at no great interval, he might have consented to be put off for the time being by the series of mischances which seemed to arise whenever he tried to approach Miss Mallendon.

As it happened, of course, the evening represented for Faviel his one opportunity for at any rate the next month. He escaped from Sir Jasper at 10:50, and ran into Jimmy Mallendon at 10.51. There was a frown upon Jimmy's face.

"Anything wrong?" asked Faviel, who was one of Jimmy's friends.

"No," said Jimmy.

"Have you seen your cousin about anywhere?" asked Faviel.

"Judy?" said Jimmy. "Yes, I have. She's with a beast named Blenkenstein. Do you"—Jimmy's face suddenly brightened—"I say, do you happen to want to see Judy badly, Mr. Faviel?"

Faviel admitted that he did.

"Very well," said Jimmy. "If you'll stick here for a couple of mo's, I'll detach the beast. He's in the conservatory with her."

Blenkenstein had been in the conservatory with Judith for some minutes past. Lady Mallendon had contrived that it should be so. People were going down to supper, she said, but if Mr. Blenkenstein did not mind waiting a little, there would be more room a little later. Perhaps he could entertain her niece for a little. Mr. Blenkenstein thought that he could. He had not reckoned with Jimmy; and when Jimmy had sauntered into the conservatory, some few minutes before Faviel had escaped from Sir Jasper and met him, Blenkenstein had committed a grave error, in this way.

Jimmy had entered the conservatory feeling a little dull. He had anticipated supper two or three times already, and he had tired of inciting various socialistic ladies to give their views on our English schools, which Jimmy had modestly admitted to be in a bad state. There was a sort of monotony about their gag, Jimmy thought; and very few of them were pretty. Therefore, Jimmy, happening upon his cousin Judith, of whom he thought highly, and upon a man, who at any rate did not look like a professor, was rather pleased; having shaken hands with Blenkenstein, whom he had not seen before, and made a preliminary statement about the quality of the coffee-ices, he settled himself down in a chair for a chat.

"What do you think about the Australians this year?" he inquired of Blenkenstein.

The position of *tertium quid* never caused Jimmy any uneasiness. Conscious that he was well able to

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bear a part in any reasonable conversation, he felt comfortable wherever he was.

"Oh, I don't know," said Blenkenstein curtly. He did not understand Jimmy's feelings, and he objected to his presence. Jimmy opened his eyes a little at the tone, but continued courteously.

"If Trumper was in anything like the form that——"

"Look here, young man," said Blenkenstein impatiently, "hadn't you better run away just now and talk to some of the others?"

Jimmy opened his eyes wide, and a rich blush mounted to his cheeks.

"What did you say?" he asked slowly.

"I said," repeated Blenkenstein rashly, "hadn't you better run away just now. Bit of a nuisance, you know. Your cousin and I——"

"Mr. Blenkenstein doesn't mean——" Judith began in awful distress.

But Jimmy was not to be appeased.

"I see," he said, "thank you. Don't let me disturb you." He rose, still very red, and, with an affectation of nonchalance that must almost have hurt, walked away.

"Bit spoilt, I should think, that young cousin of yours," said Blenkenstein to Judith with a laugh.

"Yes," she said briefly. She wondered what Jimmy would do.

The first thing that Jimmy did, as has been shown, was, as it happened, to meet Faviel. The second was to hurry to the library, which was not being used that night.

A few minutes later a waiter bustled into the conservatory, and handed Blenkenstein a note——

"Waiting for an answer, sir," he said.

"You'd better read it," said Judith.

Blenkenstein ran his eye over it hurriedly. The note was short and sensational.

"Hurried here. Can you see me for minute in library? Most important."

The signature was illegible; the spelling and handwriting poor. Blenkenstein, having Mr. Boke upon his mind, jumped to the conclusion that it was a communication from that gentleman. "I suppose I must see the man, whoever he is. If you'll excuse me," he said to Judith. She nodded, seeing Jimmy in the note, but knowing that equity demanded she should not interfere between him and his insulter.

That was like Judith. She had an extraordinary sense of equity which she would rather see prevail than her own personal wishes. Just now, for example, she wished that Mr. Blenkenstein could escape, for she could not believe that he had meant to hurt Jimmy's feelings. She felt sure he had only done so because he did not quite understand boys—boys like Jimmy. Probably he was too taken up with affairs—important things—to know how boys feel. Perhaps all great men were like that. She did not blame them if they were. Certainly she did not blame Mr. Blenkenstein, or judge him, and she was sorry Jimmy was going to be revengeful. Only of course it would not be right to warn Mr. Blenkenstein against him. That would be taking sides, failing, as it were, to play the game of justice.

"I shan't be a minute," Blenkenstein had said, as he walked away.

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It took him just precisely that period to walk to Sir Jasper's library, enter, and fall a victim to that most ancient device—the booby-trap, composed in this instance of a solution of coffee-ice and champagne cup, which damped his head and mottled his shirt front in a singularly aggravating way.

“Damnation!” said Mr. Blenkenstein. “It’s that cursed boy. I’d——”

Before he could voice the sentiment concerning Jimmy that arose in his breast, the voice of Jimmy himself was audible in the hall.

“Judy’s in the conservatory, Mr. Faviel, if you want her. She was with Mr. Blenkenstein a minute ago, but he went off to get some supper.”

Blenkenstein made a step for the door, and stopped. His appearance was too utterly against him. He waited where he was for a minute or two; then strode to where he had left his hat and coat, and asked for them sullenly.

“No, I don’t want a cab,” he said, and walked out.

He hardly considered, in his wrath, the arrangement he had made with Boke, namely, that if he left on foot before midnight, Boke was to follow Faviel and secure him at the earliest opportunity.

CHAPTER VIII

MR. FAVIEL DISAPPEARS

It was quarter of an hour before midnight. A moon hung over London, a summer moon; so brimful of silver that the streets and houses were flooded with its drippings. Silver policemen walked up and down their beat; and silver cabs jingled merrily to and fro. Round a corner into the Strand a silver omnibus lurched, just as Mr. Wilton, himself a silver object, turned into that thoroughfare.

He was not concerned with the beauty of the night at all. His eyes were partly for the figure of a man walking some fifty yards ahead of him on the other side of the road; partly for the figures of three men walking at a less interval in front and on the same side. The solitary figure was Faviel; who the three men were, Mr. Wilton was anxious to find out. He was following for that purpose.

When he had succeeded at last in inducing Faviel to bestow some attention upon the time—and he would never have succeeded but that he and Lady Mallendon had at one and the same moment penetrated into the conservatory where Faviel was sitting with Miss Mallendon—Mr. Wilton had no intention of following his friend. His one anxiety had been to get him to start. Once free from the fatal fascinations of Miss Mallendon, he would, Mr. Wilton felt sure, recover his natural ingenuity, and give Blenkenstein the slip. The

start was the one thing necessary; and to follow would be futile in the extreme. Yet at 11:45 Wilton was following.

What had changed his opinion was something that had happened almost immediately after Dick's departure in a cab. Wilton had accompanied him to the door, merely that he might see him actually away. He had lingered to see the cab actually in motion; then just as he was turning into the house, he noticed another cab signaled to, some way down the street,—and, after the three persons engaging it had got in, he saw it pursuing the other cab. If it was pursuit! The notion was the weakest suspicion, but it so worked upon Mr. Wilton that he stopped only to get his things, and took a third cab.

Faviel had given the address of his rooms. Wilton gave the next street. Getting out there, he had waited on the curb with the tail of his eye on Faviel's rooms, till Faviel issued, his clothes changed; but whether in his right mind it was not easy to say, for, having twenty-five minutes at the outside in which to disappear, he had begun walking leisurely eastward.

Wilton, following more in the hope of allaying his suspicions than confirming them, had spied the three men just before Faviel turned into the Strand. Faviel had quickened his pace. He was making for one of the big stations evidently. So were the men, who had also quickened. Because they were three in number, Mr. Wilton was sure they were the three who had hailed the cab.

At two minutes to twelve precisely Mr. Wilton, having at the very last instant rushed the guard at the barrier, flung himself into a train moving north. In that train Faviel was also seated, as were the three

men. So, unknown to Mr. Wilton, was a man he had met the other night at O'Levin's, Mr. Maxhaven, of Philadelphia.

It was this last fact—due to the mere accident of Mr. Maxhaven, having accepted an invitation to a country house situate upon that railroad, and having moreover, owing to the temptations of an opera, missed the train which would have got him to his destination at a more seemly hour, deciding to go anyway when he found that there was another train—it was this merely incidental occurrence which was unexpectedly to ruin the schemes of both Mr. Wilton and the three men who were in effect Blenkenstein's agents.

For it happened that as the train drew up at Haleden Hoo, a small wayside station, existing for the sole purpose of making life easier for the owner of the big house of that name and for his guests, and as Mr. Maxhaven, being about to become one of those guests, descended upon the platform, Mr. Faviel, recognizing his face, and regarding it as a good omen, also descended. He did not greet Maxhaven, rather keeping himself in the background, and the latter, having ascertained the nearest way to the house from the somnolent station-master, walked out into the highway. Thereupon Mr. Faviel also presented his ticket.

"It's for Malton," said the station-master. "You've got out too soon."

"It doesn't matter," said Faviel, and passed through. He did not hurry along the road, but waited again until he had overheard the conversation between the station-master and the three men, who had also got out. It seemed their tickets were also for Malton.

"I wonder," said Mr. Faviel to himself, "where old Tod took his ticket to. He's gone on."

There Mr. Faviel was wrong. His natural powers of observation, coupled with a very strong suspicion that Blenkenstein would not play fair if it served his purpose, had enabled him to place the three men, whose business their tickets for Malton had set beyond any doubt. He had taken it for granted that Tod Wilton, who had been worrying all day, would do his best to see him safely beyond Blenkenstein's reach, and had watched him scouting along the Strand with glee. But he was wrong in supposing that Tod had gone on. Tod had not got out, because the risk of revealing himself to the three men was too great. He did not know what the risk of revealing himself amounted to, nor did he supply himself with any reasons for not revealing himself. The primitive instincts, the sensation of being on the trail, kept him in hiding until the train had cleared the station on its onward journey by some twenty yards. At that point, Mr. Wilton, praying that no guard would observe him, and thanking heaven that his carriage was an empty one, turned the handle of the door and dropped out into the night. He was conscious almost immediately that he had fallen into a bank of nettles. Also, that the train had not stopped.

The moon was gone, but a glimmer of stars gave a suggestion of twilight, whereby Mr. Wilton, having watched the red tail of the train swing into the distance and picked himself up gingerly, was enabled, at the cost of stung hands and nose to find a gap in the hedge and creep through it. The other side of the gap, he was pleased to discover, was a road, and it was while he paused there to try and make up his mind with regard to some plan that should put him in touch either with Faviel or the three men, that the sound of

steps coming towards him became audible. The sound was so audible through the silence of the night that Mr. Wilton had scarcely told himself that these were the steps of a man, walking along leisurely, when he had begun to tell himself that in the rear of them were the steps of a man running—of several men running. Was it Faviel walking, he asked himself, with the three after him? He ran towards the sound, as he asked it, and got into a piece of road darkened by overbranching trees. As he got there, the man coming towards him pulled up, struck evidently by the same sound of running as Wilton had heard—only nearer now; and pulling up was cannoned into and passed by one of the runners.

“Hell!” said Mr. Maxhaven, for it was he who had pulled up and been sent staggering. “What in the——”

His words were interrupted and the remainder of his breath taken from him by two other men who, coming up, had closed with him instantly.

Mr. Wilton, past whom the first runner had slipped at a pace there was no stopping, especially by a man running in the opposite direction in a deceitful light, saw the three go down in a struggling pile, while a fourth—or rather a fifth man, who had just come up—hovered above them, calling out huskily—

“Stick to it, Coppenwell! Choke ’im, Bilks. Quiet does it, Mr. Faviel, quiet does it.”

“Police!” yelled Mr. Wilton, and added himself to the pile.

He was not aware then, or for several moments after, what exactly was happening. He was conscious of exchanging blows, also kicks and throat-shakings, with several antagonists indiscriminately on a hard

road the dust of which gritted his teeth. Some of his antagonists swore, and one groaned. Now he was on the top of a large number of people, and again quite a mob of people was on the top of him: how many one could not count because of the darkness. Heads and waistcoats and hobnailed boots seemed interchangeable quantities for quite a long period of time—a painful period when it was one's own head and somebody else's boots, a delightful period when it was somebody else's waistcoat and one's own head. Mr. Wilton had always been distinguished for his materially hard head. Finally, when breathings—both his own and other people's—were becoming hard and fast, Mr. Wilton heard the man with the husky voice give tongue to some exclamation—

“Damn it! He's not here. Cut!”

Then followed an untwisting of legs and arms which Mr. Wilton tried to prevent stubbornly but in vain. They would unroll. Thereafter he discovered himself to be sitting in the road opposite Mr. Maxhaven of Philadelphia, whose nose bled perceptibly.

“Hullo!” said Mr. Wilton, in utter astonishment, “I thought you were Dick Faviel.”

“My name,” said the American coldly, “is John Maxhaven. I should like to know who you are, sir——”

Tod explained excitedly.

“Those men were employed by Blenkenstein. They can't have allowed fair time, for the train started two minutes after twelve.”

“That's truth,” said Mr. Maxhaven; “but how do you know they were after Faviel?”

“I heard them—one of them—speak of ‘Mr. Faviel.’ They thought you were he.”

"I wish they had not," said Mr. Maxhaven decidedly.

"And they've got away, confound them," said Mr. Wilton, pursuing his own train of thought.

"Well," said Mr. Maxhaven, picking himself up with a noise of groaning, "so—as far as that is any satisfaction to you, sir—so, I guess, has Mr. Faviel."

CHAPTER IX

IN WHICH MISS ETTA WARLEY IS SAVED FROM PERIL

FEW men could say a thing more impressively than the Rev. Wilfrid Amyas Warley-Warley, Rector of Langston Bucket; or say it more often without its losing its impressiveness. Parishioners found this in regard to his sermons. A testimonial to the fact might have been gathered by any one who had chanced to listen to a conversation carried on between Mrs. Warley-Warley and old Mr. Mole—a thatcher and ditcher when the spirit moved him—upon the morning immediately following the night of Mr. Faviel's disappearance.

"I've heer'd Mr. Warley say that 'bout chewing being come like straight from Satan hisself fifty times, if I've heer'd it once," said Mr. Mole, who was leaning upon the gate leading into his cottage garden. "And if I did'n know as Satan had me anyways, I'd ha' been terrified to giving it up every mortal time."

"I wish you would, Mole," said Mrs. Warley, who was herself the reverse of impressive. "It's a very horrid habit."

Mr. Mole smiled his ancient sly cherubic smile.

"That's what it is—terr'bl beastly. Terr'bl. Fifty times I've heard Mr. Warley say ut. But theer, 'tisin't as if he ever see me do ut. I've talked to 'un a quarter of an hour on end, time and agen, and he've never known a' the while as I was a-doing it."

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"I expect he did," said the rector's wife weakly.

"Not he," said Mr. Mole. "'Cos why? I had ut in me gums. This-a-way."

Mrs. Warley closed her eyes, as Mr. Mole offered proof of his assertions.

"Never mind!" she said, "we won't discuss it any further."

The subject was in any case a digression from the one which had caused Mrs. Warley's visit. This was the conduct of Jem Mole, a grandson of Mr. Mole. Mr. Mole was supposed to have some influence over Jem.

Mr. Warley had no influence at all, with the result that Jem, who had been employed for some months as odd man at the rectory, had so persisted in his obstinacy, more particularly in refusing to distinguish between lawns and flower-beds when intrusted with a scythe, as to cause Mr. Warley—much to his regret—to give him notice. He had left yesterday without any show of repentance, and it was about this Mrs. Warley had come to talk.

Mr. Mole had safeguarded himself at the outset by pretending to be unaware who Jem was, of the many lads in the village.

"I dunno 'em," he said, with patriarchal nonchalance. "They call me grand-dad, but I dunno 'em. There's such a lot of 'em. I don't rekkernize them."

"But you know Jem?"

"Which will he be?" asked Mr. Mole.

"He's a big lad, with whitish hair. I thought," said Mrs. Warley, a little disappointed, "that you could have expostulated with him. It's very inconvenient for the rector, because he has no one to drive him, and Jem made rather a good coachman."

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"Ah, he knows about hosses, Jem do," said Mr. Mole, with an inconsistent pride. "But gardening he don't somehow keer for, 'puddling' he calls it. But if you was wanting him back, I can speak to him," he added condescendingly.

"Oh, I don't know that the rector would really have him back," said Mrs. Warley, "but I'll ask. It seems such a pity that a strong lad like that should be out of work."

"Ah, it be," said Mr. Mole, who had got past the state of minding it for himself. "Ye have to do't yerself then, which isn't right—not for a parson."

Mrs. Warley returned home, feeling that she had at least done her best to prevent further accidents if it should please Providence to bring Amyas safely home that day. He had gone out with Etta and Sir Gawain. Etta was his daughter; Sir Gawain (so named by Miss Etta, who loved the poems of Tennyson) was his horse, a young and lively one. Mole had managed Sir Gawain all right. He knew about horses. The rector did not.

But needs must, and Mr. Warley was not one in any case to shun a duty, such as was this drive to Waybury, a little town nine miles off. Every one, down to the cook, had been turned out to harness Sir Gawain, and, as a result, that animal, after shying at a pig, a haystack, and a wayside heap of stones respectively, had gone off with Mr. Warley and Etta (who was accompanying by Mrs. Warley's request in case anything should happen and a doctor be required, when two would be better than one, provided, as the rector had pointed out with somber gravity, both should not have been injured at one and the same time)

—had gone off at a straightforward, if somewhat rattling, pace.

In retrospect, Mr. Warley was convinced that, even allowing for the disgraceful speed of the motor-car which met them on the return journey, all might have been well had Etta only refrained from asking the ostler at Waybury to give Sir Gawain a feed. He did not require a feed. Up to Waybury he had gone fast but with a certain decorum. From Waybury, on the other hand, he had thrown decorum to the winds. He had gone through an infant school at the far end of the town at a pace which made Etta feel faint and Mr. Warley fatalistic. At Gingly, a small village, he scared an old parishioner of Mr. Warley's, who had come out to drop a courtesy. Almost before Mr. Warley had framed the apology which he would have liked to deliver to this old woman, Sir Gawain was at Dingfield, taking the paint off the wheel of a cart which stood outside "The Three Squirrels," while the carter refreshed within.

"A practice which should be made penal," observed Mr. Warley, between set teeth, as Sir Gawain flew on.

"Drinking?" asked Etta.

"Allowing carts to stand alone on the highway. The sooner these fellows can be taught that an equal right to the road is the privilege of every one, if——"

"Oh, couldn't you pull him in a little?" cried Etta irrelevantly.

"Why?"

"I think I hear a motor-car coming."

"Certainly, my dear, certainly," said Mr. Warley; and he pulled in, so far as lay within his power.

Sir Gawain had ample time, nevertheless, to deter-

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mine that the advancing car was not to be treated with equanimity. He stood up on his hind legs, as it buzzed up hooting, laid his ears back and set off at a gallop.

This was beyond Dingfield, on the Waybury road.

Mr. Faviel debouched upon this thoroughfare, about a mile nearer to Langston Bucket. He came over a stile, and observed the runaway dogcart at a distance of some hundred yards, coming towards him. An elderly clergyman with pink cheeks and iron-gray hair sat back in the driver's seat, tugging feebly at the reins. His eyes glared like a fish's. Next him, and clinging to the hand-rail of the dogcart in a desperate manner, sat a girl, also with pink cheeks, but with fluffy fair hair. Her eyes were shut. Neither was in a state to notice Mr. Faviel, or anything else; and it was only after he had responded to the emergency and brought Sir Gawain to a halt after a short dragging run that they became aware of their rescuer. He was standing at Sir Gawain's head, soothing the frightened beast.

Mr. Warley thereupon spoke up.

"That's right! hold on to him, my man. I—er—disgraceful!"

"Trying to run away, sir?"

"The accident," said Mr. Warley, with dignity, "was due to one of those Molochs of the road. I can refer to them under no other name—er. An automobile in fact. If I were in Parliament—for a couple of days—— What, my dear?" he turned his attention to Etta, who had clutched his sleeve. "Feeling better?"

"We ought," said Etta faintly, "to feel very grateful to—to—this——" She hardly knew what to call

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him. He was a very nice-looking young man, but so eminently muddy. Also, he had a bundle of things, in a red handkerchief. Could he be a gentleman?

Mr. Warley helped her out by deciding in the negative.

"Quite so," he said, "you headed the horse off very well, excellently."

"Not at all, sir," said Mr. Faviel. He had told Tod Wilton, the only information about his intended movements that he had vouchsafed, that he was going to take things as they came, indeterminateness being, in his opinion, the essence of mystery. This was one of the things that had come, that he was taken for a tramp. He hardly realized how disheveled plunging through boggy ground in the dark and sleeping thereafter under a hedge had made him, but he was not ill pleased at the results.

"Happy to have been of any use, sir," he added.

Mr. Warley began to feel in his pocket.

"Ought you," Etta whispered, "to give him anything?"

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Warley, mistaking her meaning. "It is not indiscriminate charity. My man," he proceeded, addressing Faviel, "you have done very well so far. You have earned something. I have been thinking that if you would drive us home from here—you understand how to drive, no doubt?—I would make that something into half-a-crown."

"Thankey, sir," said Mr. Faviel.

"Very well. I'll get in behind. You stay where you are, Etta."

Etta felt a distinct flutter at being driven home—in a very much more finished style than her father's, or even Jem Mole's—by this dirty but handsome tramp.

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She thought of all sorts of things on the way—both Arthurian in spirit and Georgian. She thought of Lancelot and the lily maid of Astolat. She remembered that profligate young baronets, who ran through their money and ended by cheating at cards, sometimes redeemed themselves by turning to honest labor and falling in love with some simple and gentle maid. There was not much harm in cheating at cards, after all. Etta had often done it when playing double-dummy with her father. Of course they didn't play for money, which makes a difference. But then, if one repents?

She was aroused from these considerations by the voice of her father saying—to the young man—"The white gate on the left. Take care not to scrape against the post."

CHAPTER X

A JOURNALISTIC THUNDERBOLT

"Good gracious me! Dear, dear, dear! Bless my soul!"

Sir Jasper Mallendon emitted these ejaculations, indicative in succession of horror, pity, and resignation—of the kind that is expected from the head of a family who does not wish to betray any weakness in the presence of those who habitually respect him for his self-control—at the breakfast table in Kidgrave Square. Judith had arisen from it some time ago, but there still sat round it for the purpose of entertaining Jimmy—always a late riser in the holidays—Lady Mallendon and Miss Robina Finch. Miss Finch was engaged in the unromantic task of keeping an eye on Jimmy's third egg, which was boiling in a silver boiler. Lady Mallendon at the coffee-urn was prepared at a moment's notice to fill Jimmy's cup. It was a homely scene, but Sir Jasper spoilt it.

"Bless my soul!"

"What is the matter?" said Lady Mallendon, in great alarm. Miss Finch put on her tragic air as though prepared to bear the worst, but said nothing.

"Buzz it out!" said Jimmy encouragingly.

Sir Jasper buzzed it out in the exasperating way in which people will communicate startling news of which they know that for the moment they have the monopoly.

"'Mysterious disappearance! Gentleman vanished!"

Is it foul play?' Most extraordinary!" said Sir Jasper, "the last person I should have expected—from our house too."

"But who—what?" asked Lady Mallendon nervously.

"On the night of your At Home, a fortnight ago exactly. Not heard of since. Excessively unfortunate! I wonder if——"

"Look here, pater," said Jimmy firmly, "what is it?"

"Yes, pray relieve our anxiety, Sir Jasper," said Miss Finch.

"Why, certainly, certainly," said Sir Jasper. "I thought I'd told you. There may be nothing in it. You mustn't distress yourselves. These newspaper men—— All right, Jimmy," to his son who had risen in impatience. "I've lost the place."

"But you know who it is."

"Yes, yes, of course, Mr. Faviel."

"Mr. Faviel has disappeared?"

"So they say here," Sir Jasper acknowledged. "I don't myself believe it for a moment."

For a complete skeptic Sir Jasper looked so uncommonly moved, and his eyes goggled so rapidly behind his gold-rimmed spectacles, that there was some excuse for the others concluding, as they certainly did, that there was no doubt whatever about the truth of the tragic intelligence.

"But what a terrible thing!" said Miss Finch. "The beautiful sunlight, the little birds, the tender coloring of earth's lovely flowers—all snatched in a moment."

"Don't!" said Lady Mallendon fearfully. "Don't, Robina. I cannot bear to think of it. And even if I

could, I don't understand really what has happened. Why should not Mr. Faviel have disappeared from our house? He doesn't live here, does he? And it seems the most natural thing that he should have left us and gone back to his own rooms. Couldn't we send round, Jasper, and inquire if he isn't really at home? Shatters would go in a moment. He has nothing but the silver to clean to-day, and, as we're going down to The Ashlands in a day or two, he'll have plenty of time for that later. I think I'd better ring for Shatters, hadn't I?"

At the back of Lady Mallendon's mind, a little bewildered though it was by the suddenness and equivocativeness of Sir Jasper's rendering of the intelligence, was a feeling of guilt, which made her at once ready to believe the worst and anxious not to. She could not forget how she had schemed that night to keep Mr. Faviel away from Judith, how in the end she had found him in the conservatory—on the verge—she had been sure—of proposing, and how she had remained there, for the purpose of preventing it, till Mr. Wilton came in, and he and Mr. Faviel had gone off together. Judith, with her usual reserve, had given no hint or sign of whether Mr. Faviel had said anything, or whether she had wanted him to or expected him to. She might have refused him, for all Lady Mallendon knew to the contrary, or nothing might have been said at all.

But if Mr. Faviel had been disappointed in a fervently cherished plan—so disappointed that he had gone out and committed—something terrible (Lady Mallendon glozed over the word "suicide" in her mind—it was too horrible!), was not she in a way responsible?

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"Oh, I'm sure Shatters had better go and ask," she said again.

"I'm afraid," said Sir Jasper lugubriously, "that it's no good sending Shatters except as a politeness. The paper would hardly put in a statement like that without some authority. It isn't the *Times*, it's true, but there are limits even to a cheaper paper. No, I am afraid we must accept it as a fact that Faviel has disappeared. Why he has disappeared——"

"Oh, dear!" said Lady Mallendon, shuddering.

"Or where he has disappeared to we have yet to learn. We may never learn. The police have no clue. I am a little surprised that they have not called here."

"Don't let them!" said Lady Mallendon. "I couldn't bear it. The sooner we go to The Ashlands the better."

"You mustn't worry yourself, my dear," said Sir Jasper. "The mere fact that he has disappeared from our house and been murdered—which, of course, he may not have been," he hastily added, as Lady Mallendon turned pale—"which in all probability, I may say, he has not been——"

"Of course he hasn't," said Jimmy, who had in the meantime been perusing the newspaper from which the information had come, and also, callously, in Miss Finch's opinion, eating his third egg. "I'd back Mr. Faviel against three murderers. Of course he might have been overpowered by numbers—in a cellar or some place with a trap-door—only there's no reason for you to excite yourself, mater. Personally, I believe he's lost his memory. Young Fawkesbury did that at school last term after getting whacked on the head with a cricket bat. He got so jolly sidy being tried for the second as wicket-keeper, that he would

stand up too close when Robinson Minor was batting. Got a hot leg hit just behind his left ear. He didn't say much at the time—stunned, I s'pose,—but he gave up his Latin prose with French words in it next day, and couldn't say a line of his Rep. Lots of us thought he was shamming, and Latters was just going to cane him, only luckily he fainted in time. Had to be sent home in the end for a month. We heard afterwards from Tommy Walls's brother, who lives in the same part of London, that young Fawke jolly well had to go out walks with his kiddy sisters' governess, for fear he should get lost and taken to the Dogs' Home."

The guilty, like the drowning, snatch at straws to save themselves, which is, perhaps, why Lady Mallendon found comfort in Jimmy's graphic parallel, wanting in technicality though it was.

"I shouldn't be at all surprised if that was it," she said eagerly. "I should be dreadfully sorry to think it was—poor Mr. Faviel—but I expect it is; and if it is"—with characteristic agility Lady Mallendon's mind, self-acquitted of the guilty conscience that had weighed her down a moment ago, flew to other and quite different possibilities—"if it is the case that Mr. Faviel's memory has gone, which is a dreadful thing to think of, but I'm sure we cannot help it, oughtn't we to try and keep it from——"

Lady Mallendon's lips formed the word "Judith" at Sir Jasper. She hoped that Jimmy, who was engaged with marmalade, wouldn't notice.

"Judith?" said Sir Jasper innocently.

"Why shouldn't Judith know?" demanded Jimmy.

Lady Mallendon compressed her lips and raised her eyebrows alternately at Sir Jasper and Miss Finch.

"What's the game, mater?"

"I think it would be wiser," said Lady Mallendon. "When you are older——"

"And more experienced," Jimmy suggested encouragingly. "Stick to it."

"We need not discuss the question here," said Lady Mallendon, declining to be drawn. "Have you finished, Jimmy?"

Jimmy had not finished, and said so. He added that his mother need not mind him. Lady Mallendon, however, stuck to it with such an unwonted tenacity that she succeeded in leaving Miss Finch to administer to Jimmy's wants while she herself interviewed Sir Jasper in the library before he left for the City.

"Don't you see," she said, "that it's particularly important that Judith should not know?"

"Why?"

"Mr. Blenkenstein is coming to-day."

Sir Jasper did not see.

"What's Blenkenstein got to do with it?"

He did not care for Mr. Blenkenstein. He might be all right. Finance was rather outside Sir Jasper's province. It was not a matter with which he would have cared to be concerned himself, but that was chiefly because he was aware that, if he were concerned with it, he would very shortly be in the Bankruptcy Court. Still, some one had to manage these things, and Blenkenstein might have been a money-lender for all Sir Jasper would have minded, if only he had not persisted, as he always did, in treating Sir Jasper as a brother magnate of the City with a man of the world's contempt for smaller things. Outside his office, Sir Jasper's sole contempt was for the City, which, in its absurd topsy-turviness had turned him—the least likely man in the world—into a magnate.

Lady Mallendon was impatient at Sir Jasper's obtuseness.

"He may propose. I know that he is only waiting for an opportunity, and Judith is not, I believe, averse. Then, what with Mr. Blenkenstein's coming down to stop with us, and acting in the play, which is to be in a fortnight, remember, Judith will quite forget that there ever was such a man as Mr. Faviel, and the pain of hearing of this sad affair will be considerably lessened, if she ever has to hear of it. If she hears of it now, it will be different."

"But if she doesn't care for Faviel, as you said?" argued Sir Jasper.

"Men are so slow," said Lady Mallendon wearily. "It's the shock—the pathos—the—— Suppose, when we were engaged, Jasper, that you had suddenly vanished. Do you suppose that I should have rested till the matter was cleared up?"

"I don't suppose you would, my dear," said Sir Jasper. "You were always full of energy. I should have been routed out in no time. But then, Judith and Mr. Faviel aren't engaged. Well, well, I think I see what you mean. Have it as you like. I'll not mention it to Judith."

"And I'll warn Jimmy and Miss Finch not to," said Lady Mallendon triumphantly. "We shall be going down to The Ashlands the day after to-morrow, thank goodness."

CHAPTER XI

MR. WILTON MAKES A MISTAKE

LADY MALLENDON proposed; but the problem was already on the way to be disposed of, by reason of the fact that Judith had read the paper before any of the others were down.

While Sir Jasper was reading out the news in the breakfast-room, Judith, a little pale, but dry-eyed and full of imperiousness, was preparing herself—or rather, being prepared by her maid—for a visit upon which she had decided.

“Be quick!” she said, swinging an impatient foot.

“Yes, miss,” said the girl, surprised into meekness. As a rule, Miss Mallendon was most courteous for any service rendered. This morning she was despotic. It might be that, foreseeing a certain humiliation in the course which lay before her, she was desirous of asserting herself where she could.

“Yes, that hat, any hat, the brown straw with the pink roses; say that I shall be back by lunch-time.”

With an uncommon queenliness of walk, head high, and lips that could curl most instantly, Miss Mallendon turned out of Kidgrave Square at the same time as Sir Jasper was being sworn to secrecy in the library. She was on her way to call on Mr. Wilton, who, as she remembered to have been told, was stopping with Mr. Faviel in his rooms.

She did not know why she was going, or what she expected to learn. Only she knew that she must find

out if that news in the paper was true. Compounded equally, as a maid should be, of modesty and shamelessness, she fought a fight as she went in which her shameless self always won—to her shame. It was not maidenly, to her ideas, to be hurrying off in this way to a young man's rooms for news of him. Yet, if she had cared for him, if she had been sure that she cared for him, the mere convention would have weighed less than nothing with her. She was ashamed, because she was not sure. She went because she must; conscious that if she did not go, she could expect to hear no more than any ordinary person might hear, of an event which might begin and end, with no word or sign hereafter, in that terrible paragraph—no more, perhaps less. As she well knew, her aunt was antagonistic to Mr. Faviel, might even be relieved to know that, without further trouble, he had removed himself,—how it did not matter—from the list of her acquaintance. He was only an acquaintance. There was no reason why Lady Mallendon should concern herself about him. But to know nothing: Judith could not endure that.

She tried to argue to herself that this visit was such as a person might pay out of mere friendliness. One could inquire for a friend, surely? But even while she argued, she was thinking of that scene in the conservatory a fortnight ago. He had come in quickly—began, “Judith.” He had never called her “Judith” before. He had no right to call her “Judith” then, none whatever, if—— In that “if” lay the whole trouble. Lady Mallendon had come in, followed by Mr. Wilton; and he had said no more than “Judith.” A love scene? Judith's lips curled at the creature of fancy who could see a love scene in a single word, her

name spoken lightly, no doubt, by a young man. He would have come back, if he had meant to say more. She could not deny that she had expected him to come back. Had she desired it? And what would she have said to him, if he had come? But he had not come. He was gay and handsome and irresponsible; she did not like irresponsible people. Mr. Blenkenstein was not irresponsible. He would never have disappeared. But, oh, if Mr. Faviel appeared never again!

The idea that he might be dead, and she know nothing of it, increased like a nightmare. She walked more quickly, she had felt that she must walk; and so, almost panting, she came to the address which she had looked out half an hour before in Lady Mallendon's book.

Mr. Wilton, smoking an after-breakfast pipe in a room redolent of kidneys and bacon, a room in which the paraphernalia of the breakfast table were, perhaps, the most orderly objects, owing to a habit Mr. Faviel had of strewing things collected in his travels, from ivory gods to native costumes, broadcast about it,—Mr. Wilton in highly-colored carpet slippers and a smoking jacket, was informed by Mrs. Mountbank, Faviel's landlady, that there was a young lady come to see him.

On the top of these words, Miss Mallendon swept into the room—a young goddess, slender and straight and imperious—for heroes to reckon with and not a man in highly-colored carpet slippers. Even at the At Home, where Mr. Wilton had tried hard to retain his preconception that no girl could be good enough for Dick Faviel, where, moreover, he had been suitably attired, he had been awed into admiration by her rare and gracious bearing. Here he felt added to the dust

beneath her feet, dust which, by the way, he noticed to be plentiful. He was disposed to blame Faviel for having left him in such a dusty room, though it was the first time he had noticed it, and there was another room kept clean for visitors.

If Mr. Wilton could have been given some warning, and have received Miss Mallendon in the other room, it is possible that he would have succeeded better in carrying off a scene which it is idle to deny ended in a fiasco.

The thing that contributed most to his undoing was that he had himself just been reading the very news which had brought Judith there. Being in the secret of the wager, he had been immensely annoyed by it on Faviel's behalf. It was undoubtedly a move of Blenkenstein's, a clever move, perhaps, but obviously an irritating one. It made Dick look like a fool. It was going a good deal too far. To make a private bet into a public farce was like betraying a confidence. Besides, the public did not know, and nobody could tell them, by the rules of the wager, what were the rights of the case. Blenkenstein had been confoundedly cunning in securing that no one outside the Committee should be entitled to know the facts. Wilton had not seen how that disability could be made to work, but he was beginning to see now. What would Dick's friends think? What—in particular—would Dick's divinity think?

Well, here she was, descended upon him.

She said: "Good-morning, Mr. Wilton."

Mr. Wilton replied: "How do you do? Awfully pleased to—I mean it's a jolly——"

Something in her look proved an obstacle to Mr. Wilton's finishing his praise of the weather.

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"Can you tell me about Mr. Faviel? Is it true?" she asked quickly.

So she had imagined a tragedy. Mr. Wilton's heart smote him, and a project for going off later, finding Blenkenstein and punching his head, formed itself in his brain. Not seeing the precise awkwardness of the situation in front of him, he hastened to relieve Miss Mallendon's anxiety.

"Oh, he's all right, thank you. Nothing the matter with him that I know of."

Miss Mallendon had refused the chair from which he had sprung in a desperate hurry, and she stood facing him.

"Perhaps you haven't read the paper this morning?" she said.

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Wilton, convinced that she chiefly required to be set at ease. "All rubbish."

He was so far successful that a fiery blush overspread her cheeks.

"It's not true, then, that he has disappeared? You know where he is?"

"Oh, he's disappeared all right," said Mr. Wilton, less certainly. "He's disappeared, you know—of course. But there's nothing in that. I don't know where he is as a matter of fact. He didn't tell me where he was going——"

"But you knew he was going?"

"Well," said Mr. Wilton, still more uneasily and hampered by the rules of the wager, "I can't say that exactly. It's—it's probably some joke."

"Some joke?"

"Or business——"

"I see."

Miss Mallendon's perception was recorded in the

iciest of voices. Her cheeks were no longer flushed.

"It's more business, I expect," said Mr. Wilton, feeling like a fish at the end of a line, "than anything else. It's quite true Dick's vanished, as I say, but how it got into the papers I can't say—at least—it's an awful shame. Makes such a fool of him!"

"It does, doesn't it?" Miss Mallendon agreed. "I'm sorry to have troubled you, Mr. Wilton. But you see—I—we—Lady Mallendon was naturally anxious as it happened at her house—according to the paper." The lie almost stuck, but it got through, and crumpled up Mr. Wilton.

"Not at all—I mean awfully good of you. I'll tell Dick, or rather—— Must you go? This room's in a beastly state. May I get you a cab?"

He returned a minute or two later, having seen Miss Mallendon as far as the door, where he had been politely dismissed, in a state bordering on distraction. Exactly what had gone wrong he could not make out, but that whatever had gone wrong had gone excessively wrong he could not fail to realize. Ought he to have professed to be anxious about Dick? He was anxious enough, but Miss Mallendon's tragic face had set him on the wrong track—if that was the right one. He would have supposed that she would have been rather relieved to know that he was safe, if she liked him. He wished to heaven he had not accepted the care of Dick's rooms during Dick's absence. He wished that somebody would come in and kick him, or that somebody would come in whom he might kick.

Meanwhile Judith, with heavy limbs and a heart smoldering with indignation, was faring homeward. At the time she had refused Mr. Wilton's offer to get a cab, because her one desire then was to get away

from him. But when she had walked a little way, and a cabman hailed her, she was glad. She wanted to be quit of the staring shops and the jolting people. A newspaper boy, who insisted on protecting her dress as she stepped in and selling her one of his evening papers afterwards, got sixpence—from a very limp young lady.

The pink sheet lay on Judith's knees, unregarded until by mere chance her eye lighted on a head-line—

“STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE.
A NEW EXPLANATION.”

She read what was printed below languidly enough, wondering why people should take the trouble to make such dramatic mountains out of the merest molehills. A personal description was given of the vanished man; she saw and noted that it was mostly wrong. Mr. Faviel's eyes were not blue. And what could be the use of an interview with Mr. Faviel's shoemaker, even though that expert in leather had committed himself to the opinion that he would never have expected so pleasant a gentleman to go off in such a queer way? There was nothing queer about it. It was a joke. Mr. Wilton, who knew, had said it was a joke. A joke—to be discussed and chatted about in a wretched paper like this.

Her eye, traveling on, caught a couple of lines at the end of the article:

“It is now believed that Mr. Faviel has eloped with a well-known German actress.”

Miss Mallendon bit her underlip in sudden anguish. Then, though nobody could have seen the previous weakness, she curled the upper one disdainfully. No

wonder Mr. Wilton had been confused, if that was the joke.

And she had gone to visit his rooms!

It was quite a pleasant thought for the rest of the cab journey, that all men were not jesters. Mr. Blenkenstein—a greater man in every way—would see no humor in such an affair as this. And if a man like Mr. Blenkenstein wished to make a foolish and pride-sick girl his wife, it would be—it would be great good luck for such a girl.

At the personal prospect of the good luck, nevertheless Miss Mallendon, seeing it now for the first time as a very likely and immediate thing, could not refrain from a slight shiver.

CHAPTER XII

FIRST APPEARANCE OF MONARCH

"'Tis a bit of a sharp trick," said O'Levin. He had come over to Faviel's rooms in response to a note from Mr. Tod Wilton, whose spirits after a disturbed night, in which he had dreamed of six more interviews with Miss Mallendon during each of which he made a more hideous fool of himself than in the previous one, had sunk to zero. Tod's hope had been that consultation with O'Levin might reveal some streak of hope in the overshadowed sky of Dick's affairs. He had intended to reveal what had happened on the night of Dick's disappearance a fortnight ago—a happening the weak point in which was, as Mr. Maxhaven had pointed out at the time, that in all probability it could not be proved that Blenkenstein had violated the rules of the wager. The train by which they had traveled to Haleden Hoo was scheduled to start at midnight: Blenkenstein would surely say that he had placed his men at twelve o'clock precisely at various points—a thing he was entitled to do—and that, whether it was luck or good guesswork, they had hit on Faviel's precise vanishing-point.

Tod had rather hoped that O'Levin would find a counter-argument which would demonstrate this to be mere prevarication. But, as a matter of fact, Tod did not get as far as revealing the events of that night. He had begun by asking O'Levin if he did not think

Blenkenstein's sensational articles in the newspaper would justify Dick in throwing up the wager, supposing O'Levin would be sympathetic at all events on this point, and that the other matter would clinch him. O'Levin, however, for some reason or other was not sympathetic.

"'Tis a bit of a sharp trick," he said. "But I'm not saying it's not in the game. We're not using it in the 'Drum' because we're full up of copy; but you can't blame Blink for trying it on. It's an advertisement for Faviel. The greatest men like it nowadays."

"You can't deny," said Tod hotly, "that that story about eloping with an actress is sickening, when he knows—and we all know—what we do."

O'Levin shuffled in his chair. He had a very fair inkling of what Tod referred to—namely, Faviel's relations towards Blenkenstein concerning Miss Malendon; and his private opinion of Blenkenstein for using the papers to circulate a scandalous rumor coincided singularly with Tod's. Unfortunately he had, in a careless way, borrowed at times from Blenkenstein; repaid him chiefly by a manner of effusive friendliness which came too easily to him; and, having been insincerely over-friendly, was trying to make amends to his own conscience by remaining tongue-tied at the present juncture.

Tod's moral fervor gave him that sense of injury with which people sometimes ease their other sense of being in the wrong.

"Oh, I'm not denying anything," he said airily. "Maybe, as I say, 'tis a bit sharp. Don't ask me what Blink thinks he gains by it, the more so"—O'Levin's affectation of relating a commonplace was somewhat

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strained—"as I understand that he is to all intents and purposes engaged to Miss Mallendon——"

"What?" Mr. Wilton leapt to his feet.

"So he told me himself this morning."

"Engaged?"

"Well, mostly. It's to be finally settled in a fortnight, so he said, but it's all right in the meanwhile. I believe it to be a fact. When our friend Blink is telling a lie he is cute enough, but he was dying to tell the truth, and he could not hide it."

"The man's a bounder."

"Come," said O'Levin, who had begun to recover his humor. "Ye must not say that. For one thing, the word is out of date. For another, the elements that went to make up the bounder are no longer of the shade that they were. They have been restored into virtues, and we strive after them, since they are not merely their own reward. The flowing tide, Tod, my boy. But apart from that—and I will grant you for the sake of argument that in some ways Blink is no gentleman—he may have an excuse for babbling his love affairs. He may wish it to be known to Faviel, so that no complications may ensue. He may have followed the most delicate chain of reasoning. Anyway, ye've no occasion to punch his head at all."

The last remark may have been due to Mr. Wilton's clenched-fist action as he strode up and down the room. He certainly would have rejoiced to have Blenkenstein there.

"You don't think there's anything to be done then?" he asked.

O'Levin shrugged.

"Blink has the whip hand, there's not a doubt of it. Dick might come out and lose the wager. But,

for myself, charming as Miss Mallendon is, I would, under the circumstances, lie low and keep me eye on the ten thousand. He's done a fortnight already."

"And you say the engagement is to be announced in another fortnight."

"From yesterday, so I gather. The maiden's coy, we may take it. Meanwhile, Blink goes down to The Ashlands, Sir Jasper's house in the country, to stop and help in a pastoral play written by Miss Finch. There is to be a big house party—twenty *dramatis personæ*, not counting choruses. Miss Mallendon is to be the heroine, Blink the hero. I—worse luck—will be stage manager, having a few days off just then. 'Tis for a charity, I need hardly say, and will be in the garden, probably during a thunderstorm. Altogether 'twill be the queerest little, dog-rotten, sugar-and-water, demi-semi Savoy imitation that ever made a man's side ache. Only, I fear me, Lieutenant, our friend Dick will be out of it entirely."

Mr. Wilton's reply to this dismal prognostication, if he had intended to give any, was lost, owing to a knock on the door, followed by the announcement, in the voice of Dick's landlady—

"A lady to see you, sir."

"I'll go," said O'Levin.

"Don't," said Mr. Wilton imploringly. The idea that it might be Miss Mallendon, come back for another interview, weakened his knees.

"You can't get out by the window," O'Levin was beginning in some surprise, when the door was opened and the further simple announcement made,—

"Miss Faviel."

A tall and handsome old lady, with remarkably bright eyes, wrinkled at the corners, and an upright

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gait, that made the stout stick she carried seem a superfluity, thereupon entered the room, preceded by a small, stout dog, which made straight for O'Levin's ankles.

"Down, Monarch!" said the old lady, adding, "Do not be alarmed, Mr.—?"

"O'Levin," said that gentleman, stirring his feet uneasily. "Or, rather, madam, I would say it was me name before I was torn to bits. Ye'll excuse me criticising your little baste, but fear, as Stevenson puts it, is the great passion."

"But you mustn't be afraid, Mr. O'Levin. Down, Monarch! Quiet, you wicked one! He's not"—Miss Faviel offered the explanation with a good deal of pride,—“he is not very well at present, owing to our railway journey. Trains always upset him, but nothing, I believe, would prevent him from challenging a stranger. He used to be a great ratter.”

Monarch, whose appearance was that of a very diminutive pug with the curl taken out, had come off, but stood defiantly in the room while this account of his habits and temperament was offered, with his thin tail stiffly angled and his four feet apart. His eyes bulged ferocity at O'Levin.

"Has he a bad memory, may be?" asked O'Levin. "He seems to take me for a rat."

"Oh, I don't think that," said Miss Faviel graciously. "He is curiously intelligent, and in reality very good-natured."

"We ought to get on together," said O'Levin modestly.

"I think," said Miss Faviel, smiling and turning towards Wilton, "if a piece of sugar could be obtained, Mr. Wilton—I thought you must be Mr. Wil-

ton, Richard has often spoken to me of you—and if Mr. O'Levin were to present the lump of sugar to Monarch, there would be no ill-feeling on either side."

"None on mine," said O'Levin.

"And none on Monarch's. Once his friend, always his friend. He is rather like an elephant in that respect."

Tod, who had obtained the sugar without having as yet had any explanation of Miss Faviel's presence, had the pleasure of seeing O'Levin going through the process of making friends with Monarch. After he had succeeded in making Monarch speak to him, Miss Faviel, who had in the meantime taken an armchair, proceeded to show the stuff of which she was made.

"I suppose you are also a friend of my nephew's?" she asked.

"At your service."

"Then I am sure you will forgive me for saying that it is highly important for me to have an hour with Mr. Wilton, if he can spare the time. Perhaps later on I may have the pleasure of seeing you again."

O'Levin went like a lamb, and Mr. Wilton remained like one.

"And now, Mr. Wilton," said the old lady, "I must tell you that I have come up to try and clear this mystery about my nephew, and I want your assistance. In the first place, I do not believe that story about Richard eloping with a German actress. As I said to my friend, Miss Cort, if she had been a French actress—perhaps—but not a German. Whatever may be Richard's faults, he always showed good taste."

At a later date, Mr. Wilton informed Miss Faviel that he owed her, indirectly, his life's happiness, in a sly speech, which, as Miss Faviel informed her com-

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panion, Miss Cort, was characteristic of one of the pleasantest and most honest young men she knew. But had Mr. Wilton been asked what he owed Miss Faviel at the end of his first half-hour's acquaintance with her, he would have said a most trying time, crammed full of deceptions such as he scarcely hoped could escape discovery. The truth is, that that impression of Mr. Wilton's honesty, which Miss Faviel had received from her first glance, saved him more than he knew. Miss Faviel took his stutterings for modesty, and his carefully guarded contradictions in terms for evidences of slow but honest thinking; and, being convinced that Mr. Wilton, whose affection for her nephew Richard was obvious, would have informed her at once, had he known anything about him that she did not know, never for a moment supposed that he was fencing with her all the time. In fact, Miss Faviel was so full of her own schemes and opinions that, after some preliminaries regarding Richard's state of mind previous to his disappearance, his finances, and so forth, she left the subject of what Mr. Wilton might know or suppose for a statement of her own plan of operation.

"The first step, as I said to Miss Cort and Dr. Bardle, who came in this morning just before Monarch and I started, is to interview the Mallendons. I dare say you hadn't thought of that, Mr. Wilton, since, as you say, you have only met them the once, but it seems to me the most necessary thing. It was from their house Richard disappeared. He has frequently spoken of them to me. I do not connect them in any way with his disappearance, of course, but I do think they may be able to throw some light on it. So if you will give their address I will call at once."

Mr. Wilton gave it, perforce, with the result that a

couple of hours later Miss Faviel and Monarch again descended upon him.

"It seems that they have just gone off, this morning in fact, to their country house, which is, I understand, fifty miles out of London. Now, I don't want to bother you, Mr. Wilton, but I should like you to do me a service, if you can. I have got my usual rooms at the Metropole for to-night, but to-morrow, or perhaps the next day, I wish to go down and call on Sir Jasper Mallendon. Unfortunately, as I think I told you, railway traveling upsets poor Monarch, and I have been wondering if you knew where I could procure a motor-car, and a clever responsible man to drive me down. Dr. Bardle was saying what an excellent effect motoring has upon dogs. I should go down, say, upon Tuesday, and put up at the nearest village for a night or so, so as to have ample time to see Sir Jasper, who might of course be out to begin with. If you know of such a thing——"

"I can hire a car easily enough," said Mr. Wilton, "and get a decent man, I dare say. It won't be any trouble. I'd do anything for Dick, you know."

"I'm sure you would," said Miss Faviel.

Mr. Wilton was not often troubled with the consciousness of being a hypocrite, but he was on this occasion, though, after all, he had only spoken the truth.

CHAPTER XIII

HIGGINSON

"HIGGINSON?"

"Yes, miss."

"I thought I told you to come and change the pots in the greenhouse."

Etta's tone was pettish: it was meant to be severe. The face of Mr. Warley's groom-gardener fell in a kind of humorous resignation, as, putting down the hoe with which he was attacking the very few weeds which had managed to rear themselves in the trim rectory borders, he advanced to the greenhouse in which Miss Etta stood with a pout upon her lips.

"What was it you wanted changed, miss?" he asked.

Mr. Faviel, under the *nom-de-guerre* of Higginson, had been in his present situation for just over a fortnight. The bright idea of engaging him to take the place of the recalcitrant Jem was, Mr. Warley firmly believed, his own, and Etta did not dispute the notion. On the contrary, when Mr. Warley actually broached it, which he fancied he did of his own accord, Etta had rather joined sides with her mother in being alarmed at the notion of engaging a man who was a mere tramp, and might be a burglar.

Perhaps she was not unaware that female opposition was the one thing calculated to make her father fixed in a resolution.

"To refuse an opportunity of employing an honest and capable young fellow merely because he comes to us in an unusual way is, to my mind, absurd," said Mr. Warley. "I am perfectly prepared to admit that it is not desirable to make the thing a precedent, but I flatter myself that I have a certain gift of reading character, and my reading in this case is satisfactory."

"If the house is broken into?" said Mrs. Warley.

"I shall confess myself in the wrong."

This was a thing Mr. Warley so very rarely did that he was not perhaps unjustified in holding it forth as prospective consolation for the disaster Mrs. Warley feared.

Mr. Faviel had closed with the offer made to him on much the same grounds as those on which Mr. Warley made it. It was an opportunity, coming in an unusual way, of taking up his residence in that part of the country without attracting attention. He had told Tod Wilton that his sole plan of operations was to be without plans, since that, in his opinion, was the safest way of evading pursuit. In this case, he had not planned to stop Sir Gawain on the Waybury road, nor even to be on that road. He had simply come upon it in the course of a night's walking and running. Still less had he schemed to be taken into the service of Mr. Warley. The service turned up a triumph of haphazard. The men who had followed him to Haleden Hoo, whom he had lost sight of, and who must therefore have lost sight of him fifteen miles away at least, could hardly trace him to the room over the coach-house at Langston Bucket, except by as mere a chance as that which had brought him there.

By the rules of the wager, he was allowed the whole of England as his hiding-place, a stipulation having

been made that he should not go outside it. That was reasonable enough, as Faviel had thought at the time. And now he thought, with forty-two counties at his disposal, there was no reason why he should be easily traced to this one. The men knew that he disappeared at Haleden Hoo, but he had to start somewhere. They had no grounds for supposing that he would stop in or near his starting-place.

Here, if Mr. Faviel had considered it, was the weak point, both of his reasoning and his action. True, he had stopped at Langston Bucket by chance, and there was no reason why Mr. Boke should theorize as to his whereabouts. But, on the other hand, deliberately or not, he had come to stop at a part of the county not very remote from The Ashlands—Sir Jasper Mallendon's country house. Then, Mr. Boke's employer, whose object in making the wager was largely the removal of Faviel from the Mallendon sphere, at what he considered to be a critical time in his relations with Miss Mallendon, might have been expected at least to consider the possibility of that object being circumvented in part by some movement on Faviel's side not very dissimilar to that which he had actually made—by disappearing, in short, to some obscure point of vantage.

Though he had not put himself sufficiently into Blenkenstein's position to anticipate the spoiling of his own line of argument by this counter-one, Mr. Faviel had not spent his fortnight at Langston Bucket without some disturbance of his security. The work expected of him was not the trouble; nor would the inevitable feeling of uncertainty, the knowledge that chance might go against him and the blow fall upon him at any moment, have weighed upon him much in

the ordinary fashion. No, the things that gave him food for anxiety were different. One was the thought of how he had parted from Judith Mallendon, and what she would think of him for so doing; the other was the thought of how he was to avoid entangling himself with Etta Warley.

This last and minor, but not unimportant, consideration was what caused Mr. Faviel's face to show a resigned humor, as, having put down his hoe, he walked to where Miss Etta stood in the greenhouse.

He did not put it to himself that she had fallen in love with him, though a less modest man could hardly have failed to. What he had to allow was that she had prepared herself to see him in a light sufficiently romantic to make the notion of falling in love not unpleasant.

She was a nice child, but absurdly innocent and romantic. Any other man, if she could have scented a mystery in him, would have served her purpose, but Langston Bucket was hardly the place to provide any other man of the kind required. Meanwhile, Mr. Faviel was the hero and victim in one; and it sometimes made him feel quite grandfatherly and beneficent; at others, a wretched hypocrite.

If only Mrs. Warley had not got over her first suspicions of Higginson, she might have been of material assistance. Unluckily, Dick's genial politeness, coupled with his successful treatment of the kitchen chimney one afternoon, when it caught fire, in the rector's absence, had quite changed her opinions of the new groom, and she had reverted to her natural state of mind, which was one of trustful simplicity.

Etta had her own way, in fact. It consisted largely in superintending Higginson's work in the garden in

a kind but strict manner, or in making him drive her about the parish on charitable business. The villagers had received such attentions from Miss Etta during the past few days as they had never known before. The groom drove her to each cottage in turn; she descended, a pretty Miss Bountiful, such as might impress the veriest wretch.

It was not humbug, but the natural desire to please, and influence, somebody who, she was quite sure, was in some way a ne'er-do-well. His retrospective wildness made him perfectly romantic; only, of course, it must not recur—the wildness mustn't. He might not be destined to greatness, but, at least, she could aid into right paths this handsome young man. By being good and dignified, as well as pretty, she could not fail to impress him. And indeed, while she was dignified, Higginson was apparently impressed: it was when she became kindly and stooped to conquer, that he wasn't grateful. She could not explain what it was in his behavior that annoyed her, unless it was his want of intelligence. Now, for example, when one would have supposed that he would have so humbly adored her as to be counting the moments when he might shift flower-pots under her eye, instead of coming at the time she had named, he had forgotten all about it. It was humiliating, and she resented it.

She was in a state of high resentment at the present moment.

"I imagined that I had told you that I wanted the chrysanthemums moved," she said. "If they're not too heavy for you, of course. In that case I'll do them myself."

Dick concealed a smile at the babe-like irony, and set about the business of moving the chrysanthemums

with a great pretense of assiduity. Etta, superintending, made him take three pots at a time, by way of punishment, and would not talk for several minutes; not, indeed, until Dick, having inadvertently dropped a pot, which crashed to pieces on the stone floor, still more inadvertently said "Damn!" adding, without noticing the lapse—"I'm sorry, miss. I hope it wasn't a valuable one."

Miss Etta was all shocked dignity.

"The pot does not matter," she said. "But I am sorry, very sorry, that you should dare to use such language in my presence."

"What did I say?" asked the abashed Higginson.

"Never mind!" said Etta.

"Was it——?"

"Higginson!"

Dick turned away to conceal a grin at the assumption of modesty.

"It was a slip, miss," he announced, between coughs.

"I hope so," said Etta, "and I hope you will never, never make such a slip again."

This sentiment, having been delivered in a tone altogether crushing, and Higginson appearing unusually contrite, she was restored to her natural good spirits, and in a very little while conversation was flowing in the desired channels. The fact is, Etta, who had been visited by some friends of hers, the Mordants, in the morning, had a piece of news to communicate which she would have rejoiced to tell any one, and felt would particularly impress Higginson. She entered upon it without much subtlety.

"Have you ever seen a play, Higginson?" she inquired.

Higginson admitted that he had.

"I suppose," said Etta, "that you thought the actresses very beautiful."

Higginson admitted that he did, as he was supposed to.

"Well," said Etta, "what do you think, Higginson? I'm going to be an actress!"

"You don't say it?"

Etta nodded.

"In some amateur theatricals which Lady Mallendon is going to give on behalf of a charity at The Ashlands."

"Lady Mallendon?"

She did not notice his question, but went on, full of herself—

"Many people think that amateur theatricals are often better done than real professional ones. But anyhow this ought to be splendid. It's so kind of Lady Mallendon, isn't it, to do it for a charity? I dare say, if you're very anxious for it, Higginson, you would be allowed to go over and see it with the other servants—as I'm acting."

"Thanky," said Higginson, who was considering the offer. "It would be a fine sight."

"You don't seem very curious to know what part I am to take," said Etta reproachfully.

"I'd like to know, miss."

"Well," said Etta, "it's not exactly what is called a big part. Miss Muriel Mordant was to have taken it, but she's ill. That's why Mrs. Mordant came over this morning to ask me if I would play it instead. Lady Mallendon thought I would be just the person when Mrs. Mordant suggested it. There's a Princess in the play, and she's going to be done by Miss Mal-

london. I'm to be her maid. It's rather curious, isn't it, Higginson, that I should be a maid?"

Etta languished a little.

"It is, miss, very curious. I should hardly think," said Higginson cautiously, "that you'd know how to do it, being a young lady."

It was this sort of dullness that exasperated Miss Warley.

"Of course you don't understand. Acting—is—it's a matter of temperament. If you have the imagination, you can be anything. I believe I could be a— a scullery maid, if I worked myself up. And"—Etta spoke with great unconcern—"if you had the temperament, you could be a Prince."

"Law," said Dick, "I don't think that would be much in my line."

If only he wouldn't use those vulgar expressions at such moments, Etta thought. She almost preferred the wicked ones.

"Don't you ever feel ambitious, Higginson? Don't you ever want to rise above your position?" she asked impatiently. There was a little extra glow in her healthy cheeks, and her eyes sparkled: danger signals to the wary groom-gardener.

He pondered the question with the sobriety due to his assumed profession.

"I don't know," he said at last, "but what I haven't fancied butlering in a big house—— But there's the responsibility, miss."

Etta flounced out of the greenhouse in a rage. Higginson might look handsome, and dashing, and romantic, but he had a prosaic soul. How could his highest ambition be to become a butler?

She took her bicycle, intending to go for a ride to

soothe her wounded feelings. Passing a respectably dressed man whom she had seen once or twice of late in the village, she said to herself, "He might be a butler"—and thought the less of Higginson.

CHAPTER XIV

MR. BOKE ON THE TRAIL

THE days that had intervened between the night of Mr. Faviel's successful evasion of Blenkenstein's detective agent and the afternoon upon which Miss Etta Warley went out for the ride on her bicycle, had been spent by Mr. Boke in no idle fashion.

His presence in Langston Bucket—for that it was Mr. Boke whom Etta took for a typical butler may be at once confessed—had been a good deal more frequent than Etta or any one else supposed. For three or four days past in fact Mr. Boke—who would have given his name, if challenged, as Captain Bunbury (retired) and his address as "The Windmill," Hanging Coppice—had been keeping an eye on the rector's new groom-gardener.

How had Mr. Boke arrived at Langston Bucket in the first instance? By no mere chance, nor yet—as he himself would have been the first to allow—by the help of any profound a priori reasoning. When Mr. Boke drew his men off the prostrate bodies of Mr. Maxhaven and Tod Wilton about half-a-mile from the station of Haleden Hoo—having discovered that his proper quarry had escaped, things appeared to the detective about as black as they could be. There was no precise good in attempting to pursue a man by night who had got twenty minutes' start over an unknown country, and Mr. Boke had not attempted it.

His immediate business was to make sure that the two gentlemen whom he had so mistakenly assaulted—and of whose identity he was ignorant—should not succeed in placing the police upon his track, as they might not unreasonably be expected to do. The position of the hunted hunter was not one that appealed to Mr. Boke. Accordingly he dismissed his two followers in different directions, and himself, having walked about till he was weary, took a workmen's train up to London in the morning.

At eleven o'clock the next day Mr. Boke went to communicate the result of his night's raiding to Blenkenstein. It was a humiliating thing to have to do, but no other course was open to him. If the youth at the inquiry office could have known what feelings animated Mr. Boke on this occasion of his second visit he might have had his revenge. Luckily, he could not know, and meekly conducted Mr. Boke to his employer's presence.

"Well?" said Blenkenstein eagerly.

"Gone away, sir," said Mr. Boke with sadness.

Blenkenstein's face, which had been almost puckered with anxiety, cleared.

"Good!" he said.

Mr. Boke marveled at this cheerful receipt of the news of his unsuccess.

The fact was that it came as an intense relief to Blenkenstein. Almost as soon as he had, on the night of the Mallendon At Home, in a fit of temper given the signal which was to effect Faviel's capture, Blenkenstein had repented of it. He wanted to win the wager, but he realized now he wanted Faviel out of the way far more. There was no reason to suppose that Faviel had proposed that night. (Later Lady

Mallendon hinted that such a thing could not have been possible, considering Mr. Faviel had been in the conservatory for little over a minute.) Consequently there was no reason for Blenkenstein to prevent him from disappearing—so far as Judith Mallendon was concerned—but every reason to help him to disappear, until such time as he might be brought to light, a loser both of the money and the maid. Yet by giving the signal Blenkenstein had almost risked losing what was to him more than half the stake. Moreover, he had since reflected that in setting Boke on the track before the time limit was up, he had in any case risked more than was really worth while. Suppose the arbiters had got an inkling of it and made him forfeit his money!

"Tell me what happened," he said, to the highly astonished Mr. Boke.

Mr. Boke related what had happened, making the best, it must be allowed, of his own achievements in the matter, and glozing over anything that might appear to reflect discredit upon his management.

"It was the darkness did it," he concluded. "A cat couldn't ha' seen to catch a mouse that night, and no wonder we went for the wrong 'uns."

"You don't know who they were?" Blenkenstein inquired, rather amused by the notion of his employé's rolling two unknown gentlemen in the dust.

"No, I don't. Too dark, sir."

"And they couldn't have recognized you?"

"Not if they'd bin my brothers, sir," said Mr. Boke.

"You don't think," said Blenkenstein, "there could possibly have been any collusion between them and Mr. Faviel? You're sure of that? Well, it doesn't much

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matter if the train you went down by was the 12:20, as you say."

The time of the train was, as a matter of fact, one of the points that Mr. Boke had made the most of, since, without confiding reasons, Blenkenstein had emphasized the importance of not appearing to be on the track before midnight.

"Oh, yes, we kept instructions, sir."

"Except that you didn't catch your man, eh? However," said Blenkenstein, who could be magnanimous when things were going well with him, "as it happens, I don't mind about that, provided, of course, you can get on to his tracks again soon. I want him watched now, not shown up. I want you to be so sure of him that any moment I decide on I can go up to him and put a letter in his hand."

It may be mentioned here that the token of failure on Faviel's part and success on Blenkenstein's was to consist, by the decision of O'Levin's guests, in a letter written by Mr. Blenkenstein being put into Faviel's hands. It obviated, in the court's opinion, the necessity of reducing the contest in the last event to a physical struggle.

"I understand," said Mr. Boke.

"And you think you can see to it?"

"Why, sir," said Mr. Boke, who did not see to that happy eventuality at all clearly, "I won't say that the job is a certain one. It isn't. It's a difficult job. If my instructions had been similar in the first place, merely keeping a eye on the gentleman, that is, it might have been easier. He's off the line now."

"You let him off," said Blenkenstein angrily. "If you can't manage to find him, somebody else——" he checked himself. He did not wish to put Mr. Boke

against him. "Look here, man, you must do your best. There's no great difficulty."

"Needles, sir," said Mr. Boke, "in haystacks there's no great difficulty in finding, providing you know which corner to look in. Tell me the likely corner, and if house-to-house visiting 'll do it, I'll do it."

Blenkenstein reflected. He was a far shrewder man than any one acquainted only with his heavy manner would have supposed.

"You don't seem very hopeful about it," he said. "But there's one hint I can give you. If he's to be found anywhere, it'll be within some sort of radius of Sir Jasper Mallendon's house, The Ashlands."

"You're pretty sure of that, sir?" said Mr. Boke, taking down the address in his notebook.

"I happen to know," said Blenkenstein, "that he might want to communicate with some one stopping there."

"Then," said Mr. Boke, "I have no doubts, no doubts at all, that we shall be able to communicate with him."

Old Mr. Mole was ultimately the means of warranting this bold statement, but only after several days spent in such assiduous investigation of out-of-the-way villages, farms, and townlets, within a twelve-mile radius of The Ashlands, that the usual almost imperceptible weakness of Mr. Boke's legs had degenerated into a veritable hobble.

Mr. Mole was leaning, as was his habit, upon his garden-gate, looking upon the view which it commanded of Farmer Peats's home-mead and pond, backed by blackthorn and a single elm. Farmer Peats's cows were standing knee-deep in this pond at the moment when the stranger sauntering by stopped

opposite Mr. Mole, and, following the latter's gaze, which appeared to be fixed on the cows, remarked in an enthusiastic voice:

"Beautiful they look, standing in the water like that."

It was Mr. Boke's way to open his conversations in a natural and lively manner, calculated to induce a corresponding ease.

Mr. Mole, who was not easily won over, replied:

"Ah?"

"I said the cows look nice standing in the water like that."

Mr. Mole, without shifting his gaze in any way, returned:

"That's to keep the flies off of 'em."

"You don't say so," said Mr. Boke, somewhat rebuffed.

"That's what the cows are stannin' theer for," said Mr. Mole, "to keep the flies off of 'em. Swotty they do feel these warm days, just like me an' you. That's why they go to the water."

"I didn't know that," said Mr. Boke, apparently impressed.

Mr. Mole shifted his grip of the gate slightly, and turned his gaze upon this ignoramus.

"It isn't much you know about cattle then, I dessay," he remarked condescendingly.

"I don't," said Mr. Boke. "It's not my line. I dare say you know plenty though, eh?"

"Whoy," said Mr. Mole, "I never warn't a cow-man mysel', but on an' off I've had to do wi' 'em, on an' off as you mid say, for ninety year."

His age was Mr. Mole's great pride, and Mr. Boke

almost lost his chance by going on the wrong tack with regard to it.

"Ninety years! You don't mean to tell me you're ninety?"

"Come Michemas," said Mr. Mole proudly. "An' I ain't done yet, what's more. I ain't done yet."

"You don't look it," said Mr. Boke. "If you asked me, I'd put you down at sixty-five."

Intended to propitiate Mr. Mole, this compliment failed of its purpose.

"Ninety year I be, come Michemas—and if you're doubting it, ye can go an' ask parson, as can show you it writ in the regingster, how ther' ain't a older man not for miles round."

Mr. Mole looked so offended, that there was nothing for it but self-humiliation on the part of Mr. Boke.

"I don't doubt it—not for a moment," he said. "I only meant, you know, that you look smarter than many younger men."

"I ain't a fool," said Mr. Mole sullenly. "I ain't a fool."

Mr. Boke perceived signs of relenting, and whipped in.

"That's what I mean. You're smart. You know pretty well what's up. I dare say there's not another man now, in the village, who knows more about what's going on."

"Reck'n there iddn't," said Mr. Mole modestly.

"Folks changing," said the wily Boke. "Some going, others coming, eh?"

"Not much," said Mr. Mole, inclined to support his reputation now that it was acknowledged. "Ole George Datton, they calls 'im ole, but he iddn't near as ole as me—he's gone, died after eatin' o' raspberry

pie, 'is own raspberries what he picked hisself in the mornin', and his granddarter cooked for 'im. Ate 'em for dinner, ole George did, an' a corpse he was afore eight o'clock the same night. Yes, ole George Datton's gone, but I don't reck'n there's nobbudy else."

"Any one come?" suggested Mr. Boke.

Mr. Mole shook his head.

"Iddn't likely as nobbudy 'ud come here. What 'ud they come for? Work? There iddn't enough work, not for them as is here already. Look at my grandson, Jem Mole, chucked outer his place by some Lunnoner or other what parson picked up on the road."

"A Londoner?" said Mr. Boke, pricking up his ears.

"I'd reck'n that's what he be. I wouldn't trust 'im mysel'. Calls hidself a coachman. Whoy, there he be!"

The sound of hoofs on the road had been audible for a minute or two, and even as Mr. Mole spoke, the rector's dogcart went by. On the box-seat, only half-disguised by his livery, sat Mr. Faviel.

"Not further than I could see 'im, I wouldn't trust 'im," said Mr. Mole vindictively, and was disappointed to see that the stranger, who had struck him as a pleasant kind of gossip, was walking down the road.

Mr. Boke sent off news of his discovery to London that same afternoon, and it was the reply letter which he received from Blenkenstein that caused him to go off the next day, and rent, for the period of three months, "The Windmill," Hanging Coppice, under the name of Captain Bunbury.

Mr. Boke had struck the Mill in the course of his wanderings, and it seemed just the place for a man who hopes to get "some small cottage, handy, where

you can keep watch without being noticeable," as Blenkenstein advised. A mill was just the place, moreover, that would take the fancy of a retired seafaring captain, who would employ a couple of his old hands, Bilks and Coppenwell, to run it for him. Captain Bunbury, it must be remembered, had been established in his new lodgings for some days, on the afternoon when Etta went out riding her bicycle, and seeing him standing about took him for a butler.

He had received further instructions from his employer only that morning, instructions the nature of which will be revealed in their proper place.

Meanwhile, he was keeping watch.

CHAPTER XV

ANOTHER MOTOR-CAR ACCIDENT

"I THINK," said Miss Faviel, "that, thanks to you, Mr. Wilton, I may consider myself comfortably settled for the night or two that I intend to stop. I dare say Monarch will not sleep well. He rarely does away from home. But the drive down has done him wonders."

"Then I'd better be off," said Tod.

If any one had told him two days ago that in two days he would be standing with Miss Faviel and Monarch in the chief room of the "Sow and Pigs," Waybury's principal inn, having driven them down previously in a hired motor-car, he would have utterly discredited the statement. Yet the reasons which had brought him to it were not so very complex. Even before Miss Faviel descended upon him in Dick's rooms with the announcement that she was going to call on the Mallendons, with a view to gathering any information that might throw light upon her nephew's mysterious disappearance—with the request, moreover, that Mr. Wilton would procure her a chauffeur and a motor-car, as she intended to drive down, and put up at the inn nearest to The Ashlands—Tod had been pondering as to what he ought to do in Faviel's interests. The news of Blenkenstein's engagement, or provisional engagement, had caused Mr. Wilton to wonder if he ought not to try and communicate with

Faviel. The horrible sense of fiasco arising from the interview with Miss Mallendon had caused Mr. Wilton to feel that some sort of communication was a vital necessity. Only, how was he to do his duty? Dick had disappeared, nobody knew where. An agony advertisement in the "Morning Post" occurred to Tod as a possible solution, but he was not of a literary turn, and the difficulties of conveying the truth in a suitable disguise, seemed to him, after a couple of hours spent with a fountain pen and many sheets of notepaper, insuperable. If he asked Dick to meet him, Blenkenstein would probably read it, and not Dick. Or they both would, and Tod, having already ruined Dick's affairs with Miss Mallendon, would precipitate him bodily into the hands of the enemy.

Miss Faviel's advent, full of purpose, suggested to Tod the only conceivable way of beginning to approach the object he had in view. Dick had persisted in giving him no inkling of the probable route of his disappearance, on the ground that he was going to vanish at random, and as the mood took him. But it occurred to Tod now, as it had occurred to Blenkenstein before, that that mood might take him at one time or another into the neighborhood of The Ashlands. The idea came naturally enough to Blenkenstein, seeing it was to prevent this very happening that he had worked up the wager. To Tod, it came in a flash of inspiration, upon which, not being used to flashes of inspiration, he at once began to cast doubts. If there was one thing more certain than another, it was that Dick would not do the thing expected of him. But then, he, Tod, had not expected him to make his hiding-place near The Ashlands. He only suggested it to himself, probably quite wrongly.

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In the end, however, it seemed obvious that whatever might be the value of the inspiration, it was the only thing that offered an activity-compelling solution of the puzzle. Activity was what Mr. Wilton longed for.

The next morning, having discovered over his breakfast that Haleden Hoo was on the main line, from which a branch led to, among other places, Waybury, only six miles from The Ashlands, a discovery which seemed to confirm the inspiration of the previous night, Tod, having thought the plan well over half a dozen times at least, offered himself as chauffeur to Miss Faviel. This was on a Tuesday. Miss Faviel accepted with pleasure. On Wednesday, shortly before Miss Etta Warley went out for her ride, Mr. Wilton was bidding good-by to Miss Faviel, not without some misgivings as to her future proceedings.

"I hope Monarch will sleep," he said, lingering.

"He may," said Miss Faviel, "if the landlady doesn't worry him too much."

The landlady, while welcoming Miss Faviel, had been a little doubtful of Monarch, as a resident of her best parlor, which contained, amongst other treasures, a stuffed seagull and some vases brought from a place called China by her husband's brother who was a sailor. She was afraid that Monarch might injure these.

"Never a dog," as she said, "haven't step inside the parlor since that there sea bird and them pots was put up. And speaking in general, ma'am, I don't hold with dogs, not in people's best rooms. But if as you say he's a quiet one——?"

"Entirely," said Miss Faviel.

"Well, he do look it," said the landlady. "And

being stout for his size, which is more, if you'll pardon me, ma'am, for saying it, that of a hedge-pig than any dog I've ever seen before, maybe he isn't much of a lepper."

Miss Faviel had assured her that Monarch's bounding capacity was small, and the landlady had beaten a retreat before Monarch's tinkling growl.

"I hardly think she will worry him much," said Mr. Wilton, smiling at the recollection. "Well, then, good-by. And you will let me know if you find out anything, or if I can be of any use."

Miss Faviel promised.

"There is only one thing," she added, as Tod took up his hat to go. "It seems to me that I ought to seize every opportunity I can, and I think, consequently, of acquainting the local constable with an outline of Richard's case. If by any chance Richard should have come into these parts, and of course he might be anywhere, the man might hear of it. Country policemen are often highly intelligent men. Our own man, Muttie, at home, knows every one by sight for miles round. What I was going to say was this: would you do me the further favor of leaving a message at the local constabulary on your way, asking him to come up and have a chat with me?"

Tod undertook the message, and, having found the honeysuckle-covered cottage in which Mr. Bigstock lived for a warning to all evil-doers, delivered Miss Faviel's request to Mrs. Bigstock, a bonny woman cumbered with many little Bigstocks. Mr. Bigstock himself was out on his rounds.

Mrs. Bigstock promised that her husband should call at the "Sow and Pigs" as soon as he returned.

Then Mr. Wilton, with no particular object in his

mind except that of somehow finding Faviel and warning him of the plots and counterplots that were being woven against him, set his car spinning along that very high road upon which sixteen days before a car had caused Sir Gawain to run away with Mr. Warley and his daughter.

Chance, and nothing else, ordained that Miss Etta Warley, miserably bicycling with still less purpose in her mind, should have turned into this very road. One might, of course, go behind chance and say that, subconsciously and in spite of her feeling that nothing mattered very much, Etta had selected this road as being a smooth one with a good deal of shade to it.

These things do matter when one is on a bicycle in the heat of the afternoon, even though one's wretchedness is apparently complete.

Could she indeed have conceived a passion for a man whose ideal was to be a butler? Could a man for whom she might have conceived a hint of a passion really possess no higher ideal than that of butlering in a big house? If so, life was indeed, as her father often said (in his sermons), no better than a vale of tears, and Etta could feel them coming.

In a little while, disappointment tinged with maiden shame did actually bring them, after which, emboldened by the relief which tears paradoxically bring with them, Etta fought them back.

Life no doubt was a vale of tears, but at least she would not be so weak as to weep over such a thing as this. It was a mistake she had made, that was all. Higginson was but a flunkey, whom she had most foolishly endowed with romantic attributes. A wretched mistake, but she could remedy it. A single life, passed in devotion to others, was not without its charms—

would not be without its rewards. The villagers of Langston Bucket would learn to bless her name. They were not as a rule very grateful for assistance, but she would compel them to love her. Some day, when a fatal illness, caught in going her charitable rounds on evenings when a plowman would scarcely venture out, had stricken her down, they would come about the rectory with downcast faces and wet kerchiefs to learn the latest news of her, to hear if the vital spark was still alight.

Already this pathetic prospect made her feel better, and lest her heroism should depart from her, she increased the speed of her pedaling. Speed was lovely. She gained an immense impetus before coming to the next hill down, and then free-wheeled. Free-wheeling, she was almost fancy-free. Free-wheeling, she turned a corner with delicious thrills, and then, with a sinking sensation, saw a motor dashing towards her. Ever since the accident with Sir Gawain, Etta had had a nervous feeling at sight of a motor.

She wobbled.

Mr. Wilton drew up in a trice, to find a pale but lovely maiden lying with closed eyes in a bunch of grass at the side of the road. He was afraid that he had killed her.

CHAPTER XVI

MR. WILTON AS SIR LANCELOT

"You really think you can?"

"Oh, yes," said Etta, smiling. "Really."

"You are brave," said Mr. Wilton.

Etta smiled again. He was not quite like Sir Lancelot, not nearly so much so as Higginson was, being too broad and just a little short. He had not the clear-cut features of Higginson, or rather of Sir Lancelot, and his hair was so short and bristly. So was his mustache which covered a big—a nice big—mouth. Moreover, he had not that calm self-possession and loftiness of mien which distinguished Sir Lancelot (according to tradition) and which did, without doubt, distinguish Higginson at the present time.

But then, on the other hand, it was rather nice to have some one really humanely disturbed and anxious about one, when one had had an accident. Not that Mr. Wilton's perturbation contributed towards his doing the right thing from a practical point of view. He had leapt down in the most frantic haste and knelt beside her, calling himself all sorts of names. Then when she had opened her eyes with a faint shiver, he had rushed back to his car, and got out a spanner and an oil can. Had Etta positively been in a swoon, he would probably have succeeded in pouring some of the contents of the latter down her throat. He tried to. What he intended to do with the spanner, Etta didn't

know even now, and she was quite sure he didn't. In the end he had remembered a brandy flask and brought it to her, after endless routings in the body of the car and applications of all manner of fresh names to himself for not having thought of it before.

Higginson no doubt would have thought of it in the first instance—would have been of more use if she had been dreadfully injured or perhaps dying. But as she was not hurt at all, and had only closed her eyes because she was a little faint, and a good deal shaken and frightened and conscious of her own stupidity, it was ineffably pleasanter to have some one at hand like this motorist, so distracted as not to be able to distinguish that it was she who had been stupid and not he. The motorist kept saying that it was all his fault, and that he should never forgive himself, and would she forgive him—could she?

All this was very agreeable, and when at the end of five minutes Etta maintained that she was quite capable of getting up and going home, and he replied admiringly that she was brave, the image of Sir Lancelot, once her ideal, had become remarkably indistinct.

"I'm not really brave at all," she said. "If you'd said stupid!"

"You couldn't be stupid if you tried," said Mr. Wilton. "I'm stupid if you like, I ought to have seen you coming. And it was very brave of you to throw yourself into the bank like that. Any other girl would have lost her head."

"I expect I really lost mine," said Etta modestly. "Only I've got it again now, such as it is."

It was fair and fluffy, above big blue eyes that no poet has properly sung, and a little nose untitled, and a mouth that was a reasonable-sized rosebud. There

have been maidens like this before. Perhaps, when poets have wearied of singing them, their charm will remain—the charm of the healthy and persistent type.

“And now that I’ve got it again,” Etta continued, “I know that I oughtn’t to delay you like this. I dare say you have a long way to go.”

“But I may see you home?” said Mr. Wilton.

“I can walk quite well.”

“I could drive you much better. I’d go like a snail. You don’t trust me.”

“Oh, but I do.” Etta blushed fascinatingly. “I will ride with pleasure. It isn’t far.”

“Isn’t it?” said Mr. Wilton.

His appreciation of the shortness of the distance seemed so inconsiderable that Etta blushed again, as she stepped into the car. Her quick fancy was already at work, making pictures. She could see this young man having won her father’s affections by his almost filial respect, walking up and down the trim rectory garden, drinking in information from the elder gentleman concerning dahlias and roses and hot-beds and Virgil’s opinion on the same, if any, all for the simple reward of coming at length to the bow-windowed drawing-room, jasmine-twined, with swallows under the eaves. There a certain person would be sitting demurely, her agile fingers at work upon some old piece of tapestry, or its modern substitute, a tea cloth, while her mother sat conning her broidery (the rector’s socks); half-pleased, half-distressed, but never revealing her maternal solicitude until the hour when the young man, taking the lily maiden (Etta was quite impersonal in these scenes) by the tips of the aforesaid deft fingers, after tender vows exchanged, should lead

her up to demand the maternal blessing. Then each would sink on one knee, and——

"What about your bicycle?" asked Mr. Wilton, who had been replacing his oil-can and spanner.

"It doesn't matter. I can send the man to fetch it," said Etta with a start.

It was singular how wholly Higginson was absent from the pictured future. She could not see him at all, except in his livery with a bouquet in his button-hole waiting with the carriage at the church door, while down the aisle the happy pair——

"Or I could come back for it, if you like," said Mr. Wilton.

The car throbbed and dipped forward down the blossomy lane, and so, on wings upholstered in olive-green leather, Etta flew homeward. Conversation seemed unnecessary; and was limited on Mr. Wilton's part to an occasional inquiry as to whether she still felt all right, and on her part to an assurance that she did; whereupon his stalwart hands busied themselves anew at increasing or decreasing speed, and the little brass timepiece winked back the shifting mileage.

It was Etta's first ride in a car; but she felt all a keen motorist's indignation at the recollection of the country talk about cars—their smells, their noises, their perils. She could smell nothing but summer, hear nothing but the bees twanging hiveward with their honey, fear nothing but that the rectory would come into view too soon.

This it did—hours and days too soon. There was the white gate between the two stone posts surmounted by the two stone balls, which her mother was always thinking would fall off some fine day when one was driving through and crush somebody. They did not

fall off as Etta and Mr. Wilton drove through. They remained on, round and inanimate—singularly unaware of what had taken place during the past half-hour. Up the short drive the car sped, and stopped beautifully just outside the porch.

Next moment Mr. Wilton stood face to face with the rector's groom-gardener, who had come from the stables on hearing the arrival of a visitor.

"Dick!"

"What did you say?" asked Etta, who having started to descend on the off side of the car had only vaguely caught the exclamation.

Mr. Wilton, with a presence of mind which only Higginson's portentous frown made possible, set the car rattling horribly.

"Beg pardon, sir?" said Higginson.

"Nothing," said Mr. Wilton, adding with happy promptitude, "not at all."

Etta stood looking from one to the other. Had the motorist really spoken to Higginson?

"What should you wish done with this here auter, sir?" asked Higginson, with a country coachman's inept expression upon being confronted with one of these machines for the first time. Etta decided she must have made a mistake.

"Oh, thanks," said Tod Wilton. "I don't want—I mustn't stop."

"But surely—you must come in," said Etta. "My mother would like to thank you. Higginson, I had a slight accident with my bicycle, and I want you to go and fetch it. It's on the Waybury road, about a hundred yards from the sign-post to Merley. It's lying in the hedge. Is my mother in?"

"Yes, miss."

"Please come in here, Mr.——?"

"Wilton."

The owner of that name followed Miss Warley through the wide porch into the rectory. Being behind, he was enabled to see the gesticulation which Higginson made, as soon as Etta was fairly through into the hall. Quite plainly Higginson conveyed the message:

"Will meet you on the Waybury road."

CHAPTER XVII

A LETTER FOR MR. BLENKENSTEIN

"A LETTER for Mr. Blenkenstein?"

"Yes, ma'am, my lady."

"Very well. If you will give it to me, I will take it down with the other letters. So good of you to have come, Mr. Bayford. Just put the parcels down there, Halkett, and I will take the letters. Every one is so busy, everything is in such a muddle. I hope you will excuse it. What do you say?"

Lady Mallendon's last words were addressed to the young man with the letter for Mr. Blenkenstein. He and the postman, and the Rev. C. W. Bayford, Rector of Hetchingham, had all arrived at The Ashlands simultaneously, and everything at The Ashlands—including Lady Mallendon—was in a great state of confusion owing to the fact that Miss Finch's play was in the first stages of rehearsal. A stage and marquees had been put up on the south lawn, and the head gardener had grumbled ever since. Stage-properties and costumes kept arriving, and getting lost: so did *dramatis personæ*. Jimmy assisted in the general chaos wholeheartedly: Sir Jasper, in a craven way, had fled from the scene with his camera immediately after breakfast. The burden of everything fell upon Lady Mallendon, or so she supposed; and what with introducing everybody to everybody else two or three times over

and fetching the letters (under the impression that the servants were all too busy for their ordinary duties), and carrying things about and dropping them, and having to have them wiped up and brushed down, Lady Mallendon certainly was passing her day actively.

"Begging your pardon, my ladyship," said the young man with the letter for Blenkenstein, "but I'll deliver it personally, if it's the same to you. Orders is that way."

"Oh, very well," said Lady Mallendon. "Follow me. Mr. Bayford, I know you will pardon me for having kept you so long. Shall we go into the garden?"

"Charmed — charmed," said Mr. Bayford, "charmed."

"So good of you," said Lady Mallendon, "to say so and to allow Mr. Wormyer to act. But the best of these — Susan, has the claret-cup been taken out yet? It must be done at once. The best of these, I was going to say, Mr. Bayford — only, of course, there is no need to remind you of it — is charity."

"Quite so," said Mr. Bayford. "True."

"Though sometimes," said Lady Mallendon, with a sigh, "I wonder if it is worth it. There is the stage, you see, and Mr. O'Levin stage managing. So wonderfully clever at it he is too; considering that he is really an editor. What is he saying?"

"I think, my dear lady," said Mr. Bayford, "he was saying 'why not stand on both legs?' — a technical criticism, I take it. I trust he will keep Wormyer up to the mark."

"I think he must be criticising Mr. Blenkenstein," said Lady Mallendon.

That, in effect, was what O'Levin was doing.

"If ye had but one leg, or were playing the part of a heron," he was remarking, "I would not ask ye to alter. Your balance is good, and I'd believe ye if ye said straight out ye could stand on one leg for two hours. Ye've done it, without flinching, for a couple of minutes. But it is a point I wish to impress on all ladies and gentlemen taking part: we must consider our audience, and the dramatic conventions. What would Aristotle say, what would Mr. Walkley say, to see a prince stand upon one leg during a critical love-scene? Does such an action strike pity and fear into the audience, think ye? On the contrary, it encourages them to smile. Ah, that's better, Prince!"

"I think that's beautiful," said Miss Finch, who was hovering round in a nervous manner.

"Kindly refrain from buttering up your troupe," said O'Levin. "'Tention, Prince!"

Blenkenstein, conscious that he looked foolish, smiled a sickly smile. He was not much of an actor, and there was nothing he disliked more than being made a public butt of, even if the reduction of him to that estate was done entirely good-naturedly. But it was occurring to Blenkenstein that as a matter of fact O'Levin was not doing it good-naturedly; that on the contrary he was taking advantage of his position as stage-manager to treat him in a distinctly unsympathetic and impudent way. Since O'Levin had come down, he had been markedly ungenial; and Blenkenstein resented the fact. It made him uneasy. Could it mean—he asked himself—that O'Levin had got wind somehow of his failure to allow Faviel to start in accordance with the terms of the wager? or was it only that he disliked that newspaper business? Blenkenstein half regretted that he had told O'Levin of

it, or of his partial engagement to Judith Mallendon. It wasn't such a straight and easy matter—the engagement—that he could afford to have O'Levin making a fool of him in Judith's eyes. Her moods were a good deal too various for him already without a humorous one being started at his expense.

She was smiling now at O'Levin's impudence. The scene was in Act I. of Miss Finch's pastoral drama. Shepherd Flaminka (Blenkenstein), in reality a prince, abandoned in infancy by his parents upon the moors, comes upon the Princess Jurabella, who has strayed from her Court for no apparent reason, and is struck with wonder and admiration of her beauty. Shepherd Flaminka's admiration had, as O'Levin complained, taken the form of standing on one leg, a pose very well in a shepherd, but not suggesting that latent princeliness, which, as Miss Finch said in her preface, it was, together with the beauties of the simpler life, the purpose of the drama to reveal.

O'Levin would go on expounding this purpose.

"Ye are to remimber, Shepherd, that the simpler life, milking your goats, fattening your sheep and Aylesbury ducks and chasing the bee to his lair, has but intinsified your inherent nobility. The Princess scorns ye a bit at first owing to your sheep-skins, which, by the way, Clarkson ought to have sent a bit raggeder, seeing that ye have but the one set, and home-made at that."

"All right," said Blenkenstein sulkily.

"Well, don't forget it," said O'Levin. "Now, Miss Mallendon, if ye'd have the goodness to scorn the shepherd for a moment. I thank you."

Judith threw a glance at the shepherd which made Blenkenstein feel uncomfortable.

"Now, Blink," continued O'Levin, "ye proceed.
'Vain Maid'!"

"'Vain Maid'!" began Blenkenstein.

"Still on two legs!"

"Still on——"

"No, no, that's a stage-direction. Miss Warley," said O'Levin, who was enjoying himself thoroughly, "do not smile, I entreat ye. Recollect that a high-class maid, good hair-dresser, clever needle-woman, which ye would be supposed to be, would have a great command of her features. Mince, if ye will: but do not smile!"

Miss Etta Warley, who was also enjoying herself, bit her lips obediently.

"Now, Blink! Onward, noble shepherd!"

"Vain Maid! Not thus the shepherd's glance disdain.
Whence come thou art, or from what sphere removed
I know not—Royal high it well may be.
Yet must thou know that he who views thee now
Hath watched the eagle, king of birds, whose flight
Thine cannot equal, hath won from the bee
Honey that lurks not in thy lips."

Blenkenstein delivered Miss Finch's high-toned lines with a self-consciousness that would have ruined Shakespeare, and the Princess replied flippantly.

"Good!" said O'Levin, of the latter. "Now, chorus—

'Come sheep, come shepherds, come every one
And dance on the greensward under the sun.

And dance lively, only try not to injure the greensward, about which, I understand, Lady Mallendon's gardener is very particular—where is the chorus?"

The chorus, which had not been able to turn up in full strength that afternoon, consisted, it was found, of the Hetchingham curate only, Mr. Wormyer, who would fain have backed out of the shepherds' dance when he found that he had to do it alone.

"Courage, Wormyer, courage!" said Mr. Bayford, who had a paternal way with his curates; and Mr. Wormyer was induced to give an example of his terpsichorean powers.

"Admirable—if ye could make it less of a cake-walk," O'Levin said at the end of this embarrassed performance.

"A—what!" asked Mr. Wormyer, horror-struck.

"A cake-walk. It's foreign to the period."

"I am not aware," said Mr. Wormyer, with dignity, "that I have ever seen a cake-walk—far less practised it. Therefore, I must confess——"

"It comes natural to ye. Thruel! It does to some people," said O'Levin. "Mind ye, I'm not complaining. Ye did it nately indeed. And now, ladies and gentlemen"—he proceeded, to cover an explosion from Etta, and also because Lady Mallendon had gesticulated tea—"I think that'll do for to-day. We're getting on, I think."

"Capitally, capitally!" said Mr. Bayford, as the proceedings came to an end for the time being. "It has quite smartened Wormyer up. Eh? Ha! I should not be surprised, Wormyer, if you found this do you quite a lot of good. It might even, since any concentrated effort strengthens us all round, give you an ease in composition, Wormyer. I remember, Lady Mallendon," continued Mr. Bayford, who had a habit of connecting as many people as he could with his con-

versation, "it is a singular circumstance, but I can vouch for it personally, that when I went in for bowls—and pretty assiduously I did so at one time—I felt an ease in writing my sermons that astonished me. I recall the Bishop coming over about that time and saying to me, 'The diocese is not without its preacher, Bayford; the diocese is not without its preacher.' Ah—well—tea, my dear Lady Mallendon? I am sure that some of us have deserved it—have deserved it."

He joined himself on to O'Levin on the way to the tea-tables which were set out in the garden, and Lady Mallendon called Blenkenstein's attention to the young man who had a letter for him. The young man, who had well-greased hair, a high collar, and that unspeakably impudent look which is only achieved to perfection by a born Londoner, had been watching the play critically.

"A good hactress and a pretty girl, that Miss Mallendon," he said confidentially to Blenkenstein, as Lady Mallendon receded. "Don't put yourself out, sir," he added, as Blenkenstein, suspecting who he was from, began to lead him into the house, "it's a letter from Mr. Boke. No immediate hurry. But he'd like an answer. Word of mouth would do."

He handed Blenkenstein the letter, and the latter still walking towards the house read it. It was brief and pointed.

"Have seen Mr. F.—in same place—meet a friend, name unknown. Friend told Mr. F. of your engagement in my hearing. I understood that Mr. F. intends to arrange a meeting Sunday next with Miss M. of The Ashlands. He has written to her to that

effect. Place of meeting unknown. Should be glad to have your instructions."

Blenkenstein frowned.

"You know what's in this, I suppose?" he said to the young man.

"I do," said Mr. Coppenwell blandly. "I may say I advised Mr. Boke to send it."

"I don't know that you need have come with it," said Blenkenstein. "I don't want any one to know the connection between us, in case they see any of you hanging about. Well, that can't be helped anyway. Tell Mr. Boke from me that it must be stopped. No meeting is to take place. I suppose that's easily managed."

"It won't be nothing to Mr. Boke and me, working together," said Mr. Coppenwell.

"The mill's ready?"

"The mill," said Mr. Coppenwell, "is taut an' trim. Pervisions is laid in—junk an' sech. Mr. Boke, as a retired and 'centric sea-captin', is known slightly to one or two farmers and a general store. Otherways, we keep pretty quiet, lettin' it be known that our tastes are in that direction. Mr. Boke, as Captain Bunbury, is puttin' up a flag-post, the unfailin' sign of a naval career, in spare minits. We 'ave, however, not many, there bein' a deal o' watchin' for three 'ands. There's a feller named Bilks with us."

"Well," said Blenkenstein, who took no great interest in these details, and disliked the young man's presence, "that's all I want to know. And you needn't show yourself about here, mind, unless there's an absolute necessity."

He hoped that no one had noticed Mr. Boke's agent

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already. There was something about Mr. Coppenwell that made even the most passing acquaintance with him of dubious advantage to a man who wished to be above suspicion. Blenkenstein was glad to see him marching down the drive in front of the house with nobody else in view.

CHAPTER XVIII

DOUBTS IN A ROSE-BOWER

THE post that Lady Mallendon was distributing while Blenkenstein interviewed "that curious-looking young man" (as Lady Mallendon called Mr. Coppewell, thus succeeding in drawing several people's attention to him at a blow, so to speak), contained for Judith the very letter to which Mr. Boke in his communication had referred.

Not recognizing the handwriting, Judith had slipped it into her pocket for the time being, and it was only after the temporary guests had driven or walked off, and when she had retired to her favorite seat in the garden—an arbored seat overrun with the evergreen, and now snow-laden boughs of the "Felicity" rose—that she remembered it and took it out.

She was a red rose among the white when she had read it—a shorter script even than Mr. Boke's, and simply addressed to Miss Judith Mallendon. It ran:—

"I must see you on Sunday next, some time in the afternoon. I do not know where as yet, but will send you a line to tell you. Please do not let any one know that I shall be in the neighborhood of The Ashlands on that day.

"R. F."

That was all, but Judith read it a score of times, and it raised in her a hundred moods. A few days ago, if

she had got it, on her return from that hateful visit to Mr. Wilton, she would have torn it into bits—a thousand bits—and put her heel on them, and smiled superbly as she did it. But to youth, so keen to determine and so quick to change a determination, a few days ago may be as much as a few months ago, or as a few years ago, in the counter-influences they can bring to bear upon the mind. Judith had come back from that visit intransigent, merciless, as far as Mr. Faviel was concerned. Never again, she had said to herself, should a maidenly weakness put her in so miserable a position, never again. Recognizing, even while she made that internal vow, that maidens are apt to be weak (for Judith was in no way self-conceited), she had welcomed, or at any rate she had said to herself that she had welcomed, Mr. Blenkenstein's proposal.

He had proposed that night, on a hint from Lady Mallendon. Why Judith had not accepted him outright, she could not have told herself. No thought of Mr. Faviel deterred her. Such a thought would have spurred her on. Mr. Blenkenstein had been very nice, too, in his way of proposing; at least, she supposed it was very nice, she was sure it was. Only something, the about-to-be-caged feeling that is the test of doubtful love, had deterred her. She had said that she admired him greatly, that she liked him, that she was uplifted by his offer, but she thought it her duty to make sure that she liked him as much as a girl should like her future husband. It had sounded rather commonplace to her, but then one has to fit commonplace words to commonplace acts. It is a commonplace act to go halfway with a man. Mr. Blenkenstein had not seemed to mind very much. Perhaps what he did

hear was rather more favorable than what he had expected to hear, though Judith could not have guessed it. The truth is, her words sounded far more favorable than anything he had expected. He had never been intimate with English girls of her class, or indeed of any class; and though he had attained a certain bluff ease of manner in society, he had the outsider's conviction that it was something far more ceremonial and stiff than it ever is. He had not in the least expected Judith to jump at him. He would not have wanted her to jump at him. Though he would have been quite ready to explain to business friends that Lady Mallendon's niece had been delighted to get hold of him, and the old lady not less so, he was not at all desirous of being jumped at. He wanted fastidiousness and exclusiveness in his wife, and was prepared to pay for it and—for a time, at any rate—to put up with it, even if it was applied to himself, though later on he would see that it was applied only to other people. For a preliminary then, Judith's attitude seemed to be all that he could have hoped for, even supposing she had never had a thought for Faviel. Here she was saying that she liked him—she would like to see more of him, she was glad that he would accept Lady Mallendon's invitation to The Ashlands, as that would enable her to see more of him. In a fortnight she would say definitely if she felt that she could marry him. She had asked for a month, and Blenkenstein, with a warmth that came in reality from his consciousness of the period over which the wager lasted, but seemed genuine fervor to her, managed to bring it down to a fortnight. She would not consent to less.

Now there was a letter in her hand which threatened

to make havoc of all her prudence, of all her happy, her measuredly happy expectations. Mr. Faviel must see her! Must! The imperative charmed and armed her alternately. She felt he had no right to speak with authority, and that he had the right of having spoken with it. She wondered if men of the kind she had concluded him to be would dare to write like that; and since he had written like that, she wondered if he could be that kind of man.

Had she done him injustice, come to her conclusions unfairly? When she looked forward, a thousand possibilities of her being wrong revealed themselves; when she looked back, the possibilities faded. Oh, if she had never been to see Mr. Wilton!

But should she go to meet Mr. Faviel? The question had to be decided, not now, at once, but before Sunday, and to-day was Thursday. She wished that she could consult some one. She wanted to know if in any case she was not bound, in honor to Mr. Blenkenstein, to refrain from going. Supposing that Mr. Faviel was a perfectly honorable man, had she not, by her unjust haste, condemned herself to see him no more? She almost thought she had, and then it struck her that in that event she had also condemned Mr. Faviel not to see her. Was the honorable also the fair and just thing? It hardly seemed fair to Mr. Faviel.

It was no good to ask Lady Mallendon, even vaguely, for Judith would have felt bound by the terms of the letter not to reveal the exact circumstances. Sir Jasper would only hem and haw. What about Jimmy? Jimmy liked Mr. Faviel, and he did not like Mr. Blenkenstein. But then he had a very equitable mind. Jimmy was distinctly a sportsman.

The idea of consulting Jimmy took such commanding shape in Judith's mind that in the end she rose to go in search of him. As she went, she saw Blenkenstein across the rose garden, coming, she could not doubt, to look for her. For a moment Judith hesitated. Then she slipped behind a hedge of "Crimson Rambler" and went towards the house.

She came upon Jimmy in the hall, and Jimmy, it seemed, had news for her.

"Who do you think has come over?" he asked

"I don't know."

"Guess," said Jimmy.

"How can I?" she asked languidly. Dozens of people might have come over, in none of whom she could take at present the smallest interest.

"Some one," Jimmy persisted, "related to somebody about whom you used to be rather keen before B. B. turned up" (B. B. stood for "Bounding Blenkenstein," a phrase Judith had strictly interdicted and Jimmy had accordingly curtailed). "Smoked!" Jimmy added triumphantly, as the scarlet came to her cheeks. She forgot to reprimand him for his use of the offensive abbreviation.

"Tell me, Jimmy, who is it?"

"An aunt of Mr. Faviel's. Jolly old lady. Duchessy, with a topping little dog like a toad. It went for James' legs like a shot when he opened the door. She's driven over from Waybury to cross-examine Sir J. about Mr. Faviel. I expect she fancies we've got him hidden up our sleeves somewhere. Matter's in the drawing-room with them, telling her she loved Mr. Faviel like a son, I expect. Bottles of tears, and Sir J. running round with a hanky. Hullo! she's coming out; there's the little dog."

Judith had no time to beat a retreat. As Jimmy said, there was the little dog, standing on tight legs regarding them suspiciously, and Sir Jasper was holding the door to his wife and Miss Faviel.

"I am so distressed," Lady Mallendon was saying, "that we cannot throw any light on it. Mr. Faviel was such a friend of ours—so delightful—the very last young man, one would have thought, to have vanished so mysteriously."

"Well, I don't know," said Miss Faviel, "it's rather a habit of my family to do queer things, which wouldn't occur to other people, and that is why I can't help thinking Richard will turn up. It's very good of you to have taken so much trouble, much more than Richard deserves, and I hope I haven't wasted your time unpardonably. Monarch! what are you doing? Your son and daughter, Lady Mallendon?"

Lady Mallendon frowned slightly through the tears, which, as Jimmy had prophesied, had been the result of the interview. She wished Judith had not happened to be there. It was no good raking up past memories.

"My son, and my niece Judith."

Miss Faviel stopped opposite the latter. She was a little taller than Judith.

"My dear," she said, with a familiarity that was yet, somehow, gracious and dignified, "you are a very beautiful girl. Did my nephew, Richard Faviel, know you?"

"Yes," said Judith. The pink was coming again into her cheeks.

Miss Faviel nodded.

"It is quite impossible," she said, speaking, it seemed, more to herself than to any one else, "that

Richard should have run away with a German actress. I see Monarch is making friends with you, Mr. Mal-lendon."

Jimmy repeated afterwards that Monarch was a topping little dog, and Miss Faviel a jolly old lady.

CHAPTER XIX

MR. WARLEY SETS OUT TO BUY A WARDROBE

It was on Thursday that Judith received Faviel's letter, and that Miss Faviel called at The Ashlands. It was for Sunday that Faviel had appointed the meeting.

On Friday, between these two dates, Faviel might have been seen, and, as will be shown afterwards, was seen, driving Mr. Warley into Waybury in the dogcart.

If he could have got out of that drive, Faviel would have done so. All the way there he wished he had taken advantage of his opportunities the night before to disappear anew. He had spent the night before—Thursday night, that is to say—in exploring the neighborhood of The Ashlands, for the purpose of finding a spot that would do for his tryst with Judith, and he had fixed on a certain glade in the woods surrounding the house as being accessible enough for Judith, and sufficiently sequestered for his own safety. Returning to his room over the stables before sunrise, after having done something like a twenty-mile tramp, he wrote off his note and retired to sleep.

It was when he woke and found that the rector was bound for Waybury—in order to purchase a wardrobe for some invalid cousin who had recently decided to take a cottage in the neighborhood—that Faviel wished he had stopped away. Tod Wilton had informed him of his aunt's advent at that little country town; and

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though Tod had expressed the belief that she was only stopping there for a night or two at the outside—which would mean that she had left yesterday—Faviel knew enough of his relation to be aware that she might very well still be there. If the air suited Monarch, or if Monarch had not slept well enough to bear the return journey, Monarch would abide, and Miss Faviel would abide with him.

Certainly he was a fool to have returned to the rector's service after his night out.

Had Faviel known that Mr. Boke had espied him returning in the early morning, that moreover Mr. Boke, alarmed by this unaccountable night expedition, and already on the lookout to put Blenkenstein's orders into execution, had decided that he must not again risk letting his quarry out of his sight until his capture had been effected—and that the capture must be effected at the earliest opportunity—had Faviel known these things, he would have been still more uneasy at entering Waybury that morning.

It was a smoking hot day—one of those days when distances are wrapped in mist, and nearer things become animate in a dancing blue light. All along the road the hedges had been white with dust, and where the sun striking down through tree-boughs, checkered the ground, the white squares had been singularly large, and the black bars thin and small. The little old-fashioned town itself, never at any time bustling, was drowsy to the last degree, and scarcely a soul was visible, as Dick drove Sir Gawain, wet-shouldered and irritable, down the High Street to the shop where Mr. Warley wished to make his purchase.

"I dare say I shall be some few minutes," said Mr. Warley, getting down.

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"Yessir," returned Faviel, restraining his desire to implore Mr. Warley to hurry, with the greatest difficulty.

As often happens, the anxiety which he had been able to subdue while in motion came bubbling up the instant immobility was forced upon him. It exaggerated sources of peril, almost invented them. The town, which had seemed so quiet as he drove through, began to waken as if by magic. There had been no one about, and now—an assistant in bare sleeves had come out of the fruiterer's shop opposite and was staring at him. A fruiterer's assistant did not matter, nor the two small boys who had begun squabbling about their marbles a little way off. But here were two women coming towards him—not his aunt, thank heaven—a nurse-girl and a child, then a man, who looked like some retired shopkeeper and had nothing to do—confound him—but look about him.

Perched on his box-seat—a sight for everybody who chose to look at him—Mr. Faviel grew as restless as Sir Gawain, who kept pawing and snorting as the patch of shade in which he stood diminished. Would Mr. Warley never come out? The High Street was becoming quite crowded in the eyes of one who would have had it as empty as a moor.

Suddenly Faviel froze. A small stout dog had run up from behind and began yapping at Sir Gawain.

"Monarch!" said a voice, "Mon——"

The sudden cessation of Miss Faviel's voice was unmistakable. She had recognized her nephew.

Faviel, his face set straight ahead with an air of lunatic intensity, was conscious that she had stopped on the pavement beside him, was looking at him.

"Richard!" said Miss Faviel suddenly.

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There was no response. The groom on the box-seat still looked straight ahead of him.

"Richard!" repeated Miss Faviel.

"Eh—what? Speakin' to me, mum?" Faviel confronted her in a sudden desperation, and spoke in the chokiest dialect.

"Aren't you—— Never mind," said Miss Faviel.

Scarcely believing his eyes, Faviel saw his aunt hurrying past him along the street. Could he have deceived her by his accent? It hardly seemed possible, and yet there she was marching ahead so fast that Monarch's tongue went out to help him to keep pace.

As a matter of fact Miss Faviel, in no whit shaken in her conviction as to this being her nephew, was proceeding to put into execution a plan which for the rapidity of its conception would have done credit to Faviel himself. He must be off his head—she concluded—at any rate to the extent of having lost his memory, as Lady Mallendon, who had stuck to that theory of Jimmy's, had suggested to her yesterday. Consequently, he was not responsible for his actions. She could not very well haul him out of the dogcart alone and unaided; but Mr. Bigstock's honeysuckled cottage was only a couple of minutes' walk away. She was knocking on the door of it before a glimmering of her possible intentions came to Faviel. Having been in Waybury several times already, he knew that the local constabulary inhabited that dwelling, when not on duty.

The next moment—and before Miss Faviel's knocking had been answered—he was in Mr. Green's second-hand furniture shop. His first impulse had been to drive off in the opposite direction at full speed, but that would lead to a hue and cry. If he could get the

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rector to come with him, on any excuse, it would be better. . . .

"If you please, sir," he began, "the horse is chafing to that extent that——"

Luck, or a semblance of it, was with him once again. He was still in the middle of his sentence, when a clatter of hoofs, followed by cries and shouts, indicated that Sir Gawain had chafed more than he knew. Through the glass-panel door, with a sideways glance, Faviel saw that Sir Gawain was indeed in full career down the High Street.

"That he's bolted, sir."

"Good heavens!" said the Rev. Warley, and, barely stopping to adjust his eyeglasses, dashed from the shop, followed by the old proprietor, Mr. Green. It was not every day that something happened in Waybury.

Faviel had the shop to himself. But the horse that was to have borne him off from discovery was gone, irrevocably so far as he was concerned, for there was no question that when it returned, if ever, he must be gone or found out. What was to be done? He went to the door warily and peeped out. Half Waybury was in pursuit of the runaway; the other half was talking loudly at doors and windows and in the middle of the road, prophesying disasters, or accounting for them. In any case, there was no hope of his being able to escape by the High Street, even were it not that down that same High Street, coming towards him, and not a hundred yards away, were his aunt and a burly police-constable.

On the most favorable calculation, then, he had about three minutes in which to effect his deliverance. He hurriedly cast about him.

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The shop was the front room, low and large, of an old house. There was nothing so modern in it even as a counter; and the idea of arranging it to attract customers had never, apparently, so much as entered its proprietor's head. His plan was the simple one of placing goods as they arrived in whatever space was vacant, and leaving them there until some enterprising purchaser demanded their removal. Very little space was vacant now.

A pair of grandfather clocks stood pointing to diverse hours, the most obvious perpendiculars in a heap composed of battered baths, towel-horses, spring bedsteads and straw mattresses. On a Chippendale card-table were piled articles so different as a pair of waders, a Chinese heron in bronze and a cracked earthenware washing basin; while a second-hand hen-coop was filled with quaint china and odd books alternately. The bulkier things were in the background; bow-chests shouldering kitchen tables, laden with kettles and warming-pans; a hutch or two with broken carvings, and wardrobes of various sizes and ages, including that wardrobe which Mr. Warley had been in the act of purchasing.

This caught Faviel's eye as being the largest in the shop: capable of concealing, in the last resort, two or three persons in either of its capacious wings. For a moment he thought of trying it himself, but such concealment, being too much in the way of a negative escape at the best rather than a positive (for he could not guess what was in the end to happen), he suppressed the inclination to risk it, and stepped hastily towards the door leading from the shop into the interior of the house.

His knowledge of such houses as this was nil, but it

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seemed to him not unlikely that there was a way out at the back, giving perhaps on to some other street.

Whether this was so or not, he was never destined to find out, for no sooner had he stepped into the passage behind the door when an old woman, of a frowsy and ill-tempered appearance, who was in fact no other than Mrs. Green, wife of the proprietor, rose up out of the dim light and barred his way.

"This ain't the shop, young man," she said severely.

"Oh, isn't it?" said Faviel, taken aback.

"No, it ain't—and if it's Mr. Green you're after, and he ain't in the shop now, he's as likely as not round to the 'Sow and Pigs,' which 'e often is. So what I says is, you'd best go an' find 'im, for I don't know nothing about the things myself, nor if I did would Mr. Green, which is my husband, keer for me to meddle with them."

Faviel, backing away before this mingling of information, had the door banged in his face. He was once more in the shop alone, with a minute only now for concealment. With a painful consciousness that he had no other choice, he crept past the barrier of littered furniture, and entered one of the wings of the big wardrobe. There was no key on the outside, but it closed with a catch.

The man whom Faviel had conceived to be some retired shopkeeper with nothing to do, to whom, apparently, the incident of the runaway horse had been so unimportant that he had up to this moment kept his face pressed against Mr. Green's not over clean shop window without once removing it, glanced up as Miss Faviel, accompanied by Mr. Bigstock, entered the shop, as if doubtful whether to follow them in or not. He decided in the end to remain where he was, within

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hearing, but not close enough to be connected with anything that might have gone, or now be going, on in the shop.

"I don't go to see any gentleman here," he could hear the big constable remark, in a discouraging way, to his lady companion.

"I am almost sure he came in," said Miss Faviel.

"There aren't no tracks," said Mr. Bigstock, as though a spoor would certainly have met the eye, if Miss Faviel were right in her conjecture. "I expect he come out again, surely."

"Don't you think," said Miss Faviel, "that he might have tried to get out that way?" She pointed to the door through which her nephew had as a matter of fact penetrated, only to be driven back.

"Well," said Mr. Bigstock, "I hardly know as he'd have done that. It's privit, ye see, that door is. Goes into old Mrs. Green's parley, that door does, and it ain't intended like for customers. But I tell 'ee what, miss, we can make sure of that, ma'am, by asking old Mrs. Green if she's seen him. Mrs. Green, hi!"

Mr. Bigstock's stentorian call, politely directed through the half-opened door, had the desired effect of bringing Mrs. Green forth.

"If you was wanting Mr. Green, and he ain't in the shop, he's as likely as not round to the—lor, it's Mr. Bigstock."

"We was wanting to know, this lady and me, Mrs. Green—it's a matter, I may say, of lor and order, no suspicions of course attaching to you, Mrs. Green—if you've seen a young man?"

"In a coachman's livery," interpolated Miss Faviel.

"In a coachman's livery," repeated Mr. Bigstock,

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"a-coming through this here door into your privit house?"

"Why," said Mrs. Green, "I have, not three minutes ago, I have." Mr. Bigstock's face fell, as Miss Faviel's suspicions threatened to prove correct. "And I sent him off straight away to find Mr. Green over to the 'Sow an' Pigs.'"

"What did I say, ma'am?" asked Mr. Bigstock, in sober triumph. "Over to the 'Sow and Pigs,' you say, Mrs. Green?"

"Yes, I do," Mrs. Green allowed, "and may my tongue," she added dramatically, "never speak no more if it ain't the truth I'm tellin' you, Mr. Bigstock!"

"Hadn't we better hurry and see if he's there, then?" asked Miss Faviel, in a fever of impatience.

"I must surely ask you to step along that way with me, ma'am," said Mr. Bigstock proudly, as though, having secured Miss Faviel, he must convey to her that she must indulge no vain hopes of immediate escape. "Good-day, Mrs. Green."

"Good-day, Mr. Bigstock."

Mr. Faviel breathed again as he heard the door close upon his pursuers. Despite the continued precariousness of his position, moreover, he could not refrain from trying to picture to himself what Miss Faviel, accustomed in her own part of the country to be somewhat of an autocrat, must be wishing to say to Mr. Bigstock.

CHAPTER XX

MR. BOKE BUYS THE WARDROBE

COMING back to his shop some ten minutes after the events recorded in the last chapter, Mr. Green, a small rusty-bearded man with spectacles, found a customer waiting there for him. As it was not at all an unusual thing for him to find customers waiting for him, and as it was a habit which had been growing more and more upon him to be in no hurry to part with his wares (the trouble nowadays of extracting things from remote corners of the shop more than outweighing, in Mr. Green's opinion, the profit he made from it), he offered no apology for having been out, but started upon the topic that had caused his absence.

"See that runaway?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Pretty good pace," said Mr. Green. "Lucky ther' wasn't nothing in the way, no chil'r'n or anything. He'd a gone clean through a perambulator that hoss would, with the pace he'd got up. They do say he was stopped two miles out by a carter. I reck'n the parson 'll have to tip him for that, hey? Curious thing, the parson was in here, same as you are now, when the hoss started, buying a wardrobe——"

"That's what I want to buy."

"Do you?" said Mr. Green dispassionately. "He'd left his man outside with the hoss. All of a sudden the man comes dashin' in. 'The hoss has bolted,' says

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he. 'Dang,' says the parson, or words to that effect, and out he bolts after 'im. Out I goes, and out, you might say, the hull o' Waybury goes. Down the street, tally-ho, the parson leading. I'm dratted if I remember when I've run as fur as I've run just now. And that reminds me, I never sold 'im the wardrobe after all. There it be." Mr. Green pointed at it.

"Why, that," said Mr. Boke, for Mr. Boke it was, "that's the very sort of wardrobe I'm wanting."

"Is it?" said Mr. Green. "I don't know that you can have that one. I'm dratted if I remember where we'd got to, the parson and I, when we went out, like a pack o' hounds, after that hoss. But I've a notion he fancied it, the parson did. I expect he'll be back after that wardrobe. It's funny, that is, not knowin' whether you've as good as sold a thing or not." Mr. Green chuckled.

"It is," said Boke. "But suppose he don't come back?"

"Why, then," said Mr. Green, "there it 'ud be, that's all."

It speaks much for Mr. Boke that at this crisis, when many things hung upon his success, and Mr. Green's attitude of unbusinesslike self-satisfaction made him long to take up one of the warming-pans and beat him with it, he restrained himself, and in the wiliest manner entered into Mr. Green's aggravating humor.

"But suppose he did come back and found you'd sold it?"

"Why, there he 'ud be!" said Mr. Green, with a loud guffaw. "There the parson 'ud be. That's all. Lost 'is hoss, and lost 'is wardrobe. He'd be in a

taking, hey? Sure that was the sort of wardrobe you wanted?"

"Quite," said Mr. Boke.

"Very well," said Mr. Green, with a sudden assumption of liberality, "for the fun, just for the fun o't, you can have it for fourteen pound ten."

"I say!" said Mr. Boke, who, having expected the wardrobe for half that sum, was less open to the comic aspect of the bargain.

"Or leave it," said Mr. Green, "as you please."

"I'll take it," said Mr. Boke. It was more than likely that Mr. Green had paid a guinea for it at the outside, but again Mr. Boke's knowledge of human character warned him that if he wanted to have it there and then, he must submit to Mr. Green's humor.

"Well then, there it is," said Mr. Green more affably. "Take it or leave it, you know. I don't send out."

"Oh, of course not," said Mr. Boke. "It wouldn't pay you. I'll get a man directly from the inn to move it over for me."

"I don't know that you can have it to-day," said Mr. Green. "There'll be a lot o' work gettin' it outer the back here."

"The man'll do that."

"If I let him," said Mr. Green tyrannically. "I don't keer, I don't, to have my things smashed and bashed just to please any stranger as happens to pop in. It ain't business, that ain't. It's what you want, I dare say, but it ain't what I want. I can't speak plainer than that."

It would have been difficult to speak more plainly under the circumstances, and most men might well have given up at this juncture. Mr. Boke made a final

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rector to come with him, on any excuse, it would be better. . . .

"If you please, sir," he began, "the horse is chafing to that extent that——"

Luck, or a semblance of it, was with him once again. He was still in the middle of his sentence, when a clatter of hoofs, followed by cries and shouts, indicated that Sir Gawain had chafed more than he knew. Through the glass-panel door, with a sideways glance, Faviel saw that Sir Gawain was indeed in full career down the High Street.

"That he's bolted, sir."

"Good heavens!" said the Rev. Warley, and, barely stopping to adjust his eyeglasses, dashed from the shop, followed by the old proprietor, Mr. Green. It was not every day that something happened in Waybury.

Faviel had the shop to himself. But the horse that was to have borne him off from discovery was gone, irrevocably so far as he was concerned, for there was no question that when it returned, if ever, he must be gone or found out. What was to be done? He went to the door warily and peeped out. Half Waybury was in pursuit of the runaway; the other half was talking loudly at doors and windows and in the middle of the road, prophesying disasters, or accounting for them. In any case, there was no hope of his being able to escape by the High Street, even were it not that down that same High Street, coming towards him, and not a hundred yards away, were his aunt and a burly police-constable.

On the most favorable calculation, then, he had about three minutes in which to effect his deliverance. He hurriedly cast about him.

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On the most favorable calculation, then, he had about three minutes in which to effect his deliverance. He hurriedly cast about him.

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The shop was the front room, low and large, of an old house. There was nothing so modern in it even as a counter; and the idea of arranging it to attract customers had never, apparently, so much as entered its proprietor's head. His plan was the simple one of placing goods as they arrived in whatever space was vacant, and leaving them there until some enterprising purchaser demanded their removal. Very little space was vacant now.

A pair of grandfather clocks stood pointing to diverse hours, the most obvious perpendiculars in a heap composed of battered baths, towel-horses, spring bedsteads and straw mattresses. On a Chippendale card-table were piled articles so different as a pair of waders, a Chinese heron in bronze and a cracked earthenware washing basin; while a second-hand hen-coop was filled with quaint china and odd books alternately. The bulkier things were in the background; bow-chests shouldering kitchen tables, laden with kettles and warming-pans; a hutch or two with broken carvings, and wardrobes of various sizes and ages, including that wardrobe which Mr. Warley had been in the act of purchasing.

This caught Faviel's eye as being the largest in the shop: capable of concealing, in the last resort, two or three persons in either of its capacious wings. For a moment he thought of trying it himself, but such concealment, being too much in the way of a negative escape at the best rather than a positive (for he could not guess what was in the end to happen), he suppressed the inclination to risk it, and stepped hastily towards the door leading from the shop into the interior of the house.

His knowledge of such houses as this was nil, but it

effort—"Well," he said—"if I can't have it now, I can't. But what made me want it particularly was thinking of that joke of yours about the parson not knowing if he'd bought it or not, and coming back maybe an hour later to find it gone. You'd have the laugh of him."

"Why, that's true," said Mr. Green, screwing up his skinny face to indulge in a cackle. "That's true, —I would—I'd like to see 'is face when 'e come back an' it's gone. I'd tell 'im it was the next one 'e'd been asking for—that smaller'n—and that it 'ad shrunk a bit while 'e was away. Right 'o, you can take it. Fourteen pound twelve. Only you'll have to take it sharp. It's gettin' nigh to my dinner-time."

Mr. Boke did not pause to comment on the extra two shillings that Mr. Green had packed on to the price to mark his condescension in letting the wardrobe go immediately, but drew out some dirty banknotes and handed them over. "I'll go across to the inn while you're getting the change," he said. "I s'pose you'll be in the shop while I'm away?"

"'Course I shall," said Mr. Green. "Why shouldn't I be?"

"Oh, no reason, no reason."

By great good luck Mr. Boke found the landlord of the "Sow and Pigs" amenable to the suggestion that a cart—any cart, and a driver—should be hired out for the purpose of driving a wardrobe from Mr. Green's to Captain Bunbury's place, as Mr. Boke called it, at Hanging Coppice, for the consideration of ten shillings for the cart, and sixpence for the driver, and a pink-faced man who was found asleep in the stables of the "Sow and Pigs" was aroused and appointed to that post. Refreshed by his slumbers and by Mr.

Boke's promise that another sixpence should be added to his pay, if he stirred his timbers, the pink-faced man routed out a horse and cart with unexpected celerity, and also proved himself a man for an emergency by procuring another equally pink-faced man, who might have been his twin, to help get the wardrobe out of Mr. Green's shop and to the cart.

It was a delicate matter, this, for the wardrobe was heavy, and Mr. Green in a fever about possible damages to the other things in the shop. But the pink-faced men were imperturbably good-natured in the face of insult, and within an hour of the time that Sir Gawain had started careering down the High Street of Waybury, the wardrobe was on the cart and ready for the journey. Mr. Boke had had a stout piece of rope, borrowed from the "Sow and Pigs," tied round it tightly to prevent—he said—the doors from flying open.

"Ready, my lad?" he said to the original pink-faced man.

"Yessir."

"Forrard, then!" said Mr. Boke.

"Wait a bit," said Mr. Green, who had been inspecting the track of the wardrobe through his shop on hands and knees. "Wait a bit, you've bin and broke a copper kettle with your clumpsy goings on. You'll 'ave to pay for that, four and nine. And there's a cannell-stick cracked. That'll cost tenpence."

"Anything else?" asked Mr. Boke affably. The pink-faced man had already cracked his whip and started on.

"Yes," said Mr. Green, deceived by Mr. Boke's previous meekness. "There's a coaled-scuttle 'ad 'arf

the paint taken off it. 'Arf a crown I'll charge you for that, and——"

"Look here," said Mr. Boke, suddenly stepping towards the little man. "There ain't much paint on you, you mealy, measly, exigious little hatch-headed son of a crab, but if you don't double-quick into your privit rat-run, I'll scrape your nose along the gutter till you can't see out of either of them beady squinters of yours, not if you had 'em plated over with sixteen pairs of goggles. Charge me, will you?" Mr. Boke's aspect was so fierce as he delivered these words, that Mr. Green simply turned and fled into his premises, without so much as giving a glance to see if Waybury could give him any assistance if he were pursued.

As a matter of fact, the High Street was as empty as when Faviel drove through with Mr. Warley an hour before. It was emptier indeed, for the lunch-hour had arrived, when country-folk eat and sleep; and along the road nothing was visible but the cart, top-heavy with the wardrobe, and the pink-faced man trudging beside it cracking his whip.

With a snort proceeding from mixed feelings of fatigue and triumph, Mr. Boke hastened after it. He had achieved much that morning from the time he had overheard—by eavesdropping—that the rector was to be driven into Waybury. If he had had the time at his disposal, he would have sent Coppenwell to mark Faviel instead of going himself—partly by running, partly by the aid of a friendly butcher's cart. But if he had sent Coppenwell, and Coppenwell as a matter of fact was at the mill that morning, the watch on Faviel being kept by turns, there would never have been so brilliant a *dénouement* to the weary search. Coppenwell was smart, but he was too young for such

an artistic piece of work. He would never have thought of watching at Mr. Green's window; or even if he had, he would never have had the audacity to buy the wardrobe. Only a master mind would have decided on it and carried it through so neatly. He had been afraid—Mr. Boke had—after receiving Blenkenstein's message that he would have to make a rough and ready job of it—kidnap his man by force—always a risky thing to do in a civilized country. As it was he had merely bought a wardrobe, and not a soul but himself knew what the wardrobe contained. All that remained to be done was to cart that wardrobe to the mill he had rented in the name of Captain Bunbury and keep him in it as long as was necessary. There were fifty chances to one against any one coming near the mill in the next ten days; a thousand to one against their suspecting that a man was held up there illegally and by force.

Mr. Boke had chosen his position well.

He wished, however, as he walked along beside the pink-faced man, that the mill were rather handier at the present moment.

The heat which had been great in the morning seemed to have increased in intensity. The cart traveled in a white cloud of dust, and the pink-faced man at the end of the first mile or two had turned into the semblance of a miller. The road from Waybury to the mill was a different one from that shady avenue which led to Langston Bucket; it was an open road, flanked by low hedges, from which the trees, if there had ever been any, had long since disappeared. The sun raked it fore and aft. Decidedly the mill might with advantage have been handier.

So Mr. Boke thought, with a red pocket handker-

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chief flapping under his hat, and to him, so thinking, the sight of a little inn, standing back at the cross of the road behind two poplars, came like the vision of an oasis to a traveler in the desert.

"You can wait a bit here," he said to the pink-faced man, who had already drawn up in anticipation of some such order. "I'm going in to get a drink."

"Yes, sir," said the pink-faced man understandingly.

"I shan't be a minute," said Mr. Boke encouragingly. "You stick by the cart. I don't want that wardrobe lost sight of. See?"

"Yes, sir," said the pink-faced man, in a flat key.

Mr. Boke hurried in through the little wooden porch into the grateful gloom of the bar parlor, with its sanded floor and cool smell of malt.

"A pint of bitter, ma'am," he said to the woman who responded to his call, and sank into a settle. It was not his intention to forget the pink-faced man, by whom a pint of beer would no doubt be welcomed. Indeed Mr. Boke, whose considerateness was great, wondered, as the cool liquor flowed down his throat, whether he could not, by some means or other, also convey a pint to the unfortunate prisoner in the wardrobe. Not quite seeing his way to this act of mercy he ordered another pint, and sipped it contemplatively. The minute he had undertaken to be absent grew to five minutes, and the five to ten, and Mr. Boke was still sipping.

Meanwhile the pink-faced man, not understanding what was in store for him, grew restive. It was all very well for the gentleman to be in there, and the pink-faced man did not mind waiting a bit, though the poplars gave no shade at all, and even in their feathery

tops scarcely held a cupful of wind. But suppose the gentleman came out when he'd done his drinking and wanted to go straight on. He was in a bit of a hurry, except when he was drinking himself. The possibility of going straight on without a mug of beer did not appeal to the pink-faced man. It seemed to him a monstrous possibility, and all because the gentleman wanted an eye kept on the wardrobe. But the wardrobe couldn't run away. The horse certainly wouldn't. The pink-faced man knew the horse well enough to swear that the horse wouldn't move, unless you jogged him.

There was a little path that ran round to the back of the inn. The pink-faced man followed it. He would not disturb the gentleman at his drinking, but he would prevent the horrible contingency of an honest driver being suddenly moved on without so much as having wetted his whistle.

"A pint, mum," said the pink-faced man to the landlady, as she came round to the back, "and if you'd kindly let me know when the gent what's inside 'as done 'is drinking!" The pink-faced man delivered a slow wink that was rather an explanation than a subtlety. "Here's wishin' you health, mum," he added, and put his head back skilfully.

The landlady nodded. She had just taken Mr. Boke his third pint.

CHAPTER XXI

JIMMY INTERVENES

JIMMY was out for the day between lunch and dinner-time for a bribe of one shilling and sixpence per hour. Jimmy was not averse to accepting a bribe, providing it was diplomatically offered; and Lady Mallendon, who had received a hint from O'Levin that rehearsals were likely to go more smoothly without the assistance of Jimmy's criticisms and emendations, had been diplomatic.

"It's so very disappointing for you that your friend Butt couldn't come," she said, referring to the fact that a school friend of Jimmy's, who had promised to come and stop a few days had developed mumps, much to Jimmy's indignation, "but you mustn't allow it to weigh on your spirits. And I do think, Jimmy, you ought to go for a long walk. It would do you so much good. You're looking quite pale for want of exercise."

This was not perfectly true, but it was, as has been said, diplomatic.

"*Quel est le jeu?*" said Jimmy lazily.

"I want you to go for a long, long walk."

"*Combiang?*" said Jimmy.

"I don't think," said Lady Mallendon, "that you ought to bargain with me like that. It isn't right. But I should like it to be a really long walk."

"Bob an hour?" Jimmy suggested.

"I do wish you wouldn't use slang," said Lady Mallendon pathetically. "What is a bob?"

"Half-a-crown!" said Jimmy, who disliked innocence.

"Oh, that's too much," said Lady Mallendon firmly. "I couldn't give more than a shilling and—and sixpence."

"Cash down!" said Jimmy. "I'll take four hours' worth to start with, and see how things pan out. It's jolly cheap for a stuffy day like this."

Lady Mallendon paid up the sum, conscious that Jimmy having made a bargain would stick to it, which, considering how simple an art it was to work upon Lady Mallendon's feelings, was greatly to Jimmy's credit.

It was Jimmy's intention to get his father to go out with him, but Sir Jasper, who had sustained an injury to the wrists as a result of hanging by them for a couple of agonizing minutes from the bough of a tree, up which Jimmy had decoyed him the evening before (to photograph a bird's nest)—and from which Sir Jasper had finally dropped, luckily without breaking any bones—declined to be drawn.

"Must have a breathing-space between the battles," said Sir Jasper.

"We shouldn't be going after birds this time," Jimmy said persuasively. "At least I thought of looking for a kingfisher's nest for you. There wouldn't be any climbing for that."

"Wading," said Sir Jasper. "Gout—no thank'ee. Not to-day, Jimmy."

"All right," said Jimmy. "I thought you'd like it. That's all."

"Well, so I should," Sir Jasper allowed. "Any

other day, you know. You find the nest, and we'll see. Five bob? No, I don't think I've got it. Besides, what do you want with it, eh? Saw Ames give me two half-crowns in change? Well, there you are. Don't spend 'em."

"I'll have them made into tie-pins for your birthday," said Jimmy sarcastically, and departed, moderately well endowed for his afternoon out. He was not exactly a spendthrift boy, but he liked to have money with him, in case he saw anything that he fancied or anybody asked him for some.

Armed with an air-gun walking-stick—a recent purchase, the price of which he had earned somewhat easily a few days before, by consenting to have his hair cut—Jimmy set out with no particular object in his mind, except that of serving his time, so to speak, conscientiously and potting anything that might come within a sporting range—from a lamp-post downwards. He was not in the best of spirits, partly because of his friend's failure to arrive, partly because the perpetual fussings about Miss Finch's play, and the setting aside of all decent amusement for that purpose, had got on his nerves for the last day or two. Judith, too, consenting to have Mr. Blenkenstein hanging about annoyed him. He had not been initiated into the exact arrangement between these two, but he understood vaguely that there was a chance—to say the least of it—of the beast becoming at some future day his cousin-in-law. The possibility lowered Jimmy in his own esteem. A promise he had given not deliberately to annoy Blenkenstein further irritated him. He had given it at Judith's request, but that was before he had understood what was going on. He did not profess to understand now thoroughly, but he felt that

if he had understood as much as he did before, he would never have given the promise. Girls, it seemed, had to be protected against themselves, but he had bound himself over not to protect Judy.

Altogether Jimmy was depressed, and saw very little fun in prospect during the next week, unless it was the prospect of observing Mr. Wormyer in process of falling in love with Miss Finch. O'Levin had thoughtlessly suggested this in Jimmy's hearing, and Jimmy had promised himself some amusement from it. He was reminded of it when passing Miss Finch on his way out, and, later on, by the sight of Mr. Wormyer hurrying along to take part in the afternoon's rehearsals, just as Jimmy was issuing forth from the lodge gates. He greeted Mr. Wormyer now with a wave of the hand, after the manner of Mr. Bayford.

"And how is the world treating you, Wormyer?" said Jimmy, in Mr. Bayford's voice. "How is the world treating you?"

The curate, who was an unobservant little man, and plunged in the abstraction of joyous contemplation, replied innocently,

"Very well, I thank you, Mr. Bay—— Oh, Mr. Jimmy, is it? I am not late, I trust?"

"I don't think so," said Jimmy. "In fact, just as I came away, Miss Finch was going out for a walk, a little walk—she said."

"Oh dear, perhaps I am too early then?"

"This way—to meet some one. They were rather,"—Jimmy said ingenuously—"ragging her about it. Hullo," he added, "there she comes. I expect you'd like me to go on?"

"Why—er," said Mr. Wormyer, coloring, "do you mean that—I am such——"

But Jimmy moved on his way, chanting—

"Come sheep, come shepherds: come every one,"

leaving Mr. Wormyer in considerable confusion, the more especially as the Mordants' brake containing another relay of *dramatis personæ*, including Miss Etta Warley, was just coming up from behind, and Jimmy appeared to be making gesticulations to its occupants, which might, Mr. Wormyer thought, be a continuation of a jest which, he was sure, Miss Finch would consider in bad taste.

Jimmy, however, was not sunk low enough, despite his low spirits, for this. He was merely mimicking Mr. Bayford's method of saluting for Miss Warley's benefit, Miss Warley and he having struck up rather a friendship; and he would not have done this, but that the others were not sufficiently acquainted with Mr. Bayford to understand.

Still, it must be confessed Jimmy's methods were not as high-toned that afternoon as they generally were. Otherwise, he would hardly have done what he did later.

This was to shoot at a farmer, and it was done, Jimmy considered, under provocation. The event occurred a good hour later, and the provocation was offered under the following circumstances. Jimmy having wandered about six miles from his own home was proceeding along the edge of a field, taking occasional shots with the gun-stick at things that attracted his attention, when a well-made scarecrow drew his eye. It struck Jimmy that here was a mark which

would really test the gun. Hitherto that weapon had not succeeded in hitting anything, which Jimmy was beginning to be afraid was due to the fact that it shot crooked, though he was willing to admit that it is not easy to shoot a swallow on the wing—or even on a telegraph wire—with a small bullet. A dozen shots at a scarecrow would be the very thing.

He had had four of his dozen and hit the scarecrow once—in the hat—when a shout from the other side of the field informed him that there was a spectator of his powers. As, however, the shout was from the other side of the field, which was a large one—of corn—not therefore to be traversed except on the circumference; and as, in any case, he was not doing any harm that he knew of, and would have been rather glad if he had been, Jimmy paid no attention whatever to the shout; and he had got as far as his ninth shot, a very successful one which unfortunately knocked the hat of the scarecrow clean off, before he came aware that the shouter was a man of annoying determination.

“You little varment. I’ll wring yer neck for ’ee, when I get ’ee.”

The shout was so very distinct that Jimmy perforce looked round and beheld a gaitered man, very red in the face, hurrying towards him along the edge of the corn.

Jimmy measured the distance between himself and the gaitered man, decided that it was still fifty yards, reflected again that he was not doing any harm, and took his tenth shot.

“I’ll thrash ’ee till ’ee wriggle,” yelled the farmer.

Jimmy took his eleventh shot at the scarecrow, and turned smartly.

"Did you want to know the time?" he inquired, walking backwards.

"I'll dang 'ee. You shoot at me! Ow!" The farmer leaped and howled, as the gun-stick, which Jimmy had undoubtedly pointed in his direction, went off. As Jimmy said afterwards, it would not have hurt him, even if it had hit him, and he deserved to be hit. Decent farmers do not threaten to thrash you because you are practising at their scarecrow, practically, that is to say, keeping off the birds for them. It was not, as Jimmy pointed out, as if he had been walking through the corn.

Jimmy pointed out these things afterwards. At the time, immediately upon the discharge of his twelfth shot, he fled. There was nothing else to be done. Jimmy fled precipitately, with a start of some twenty-five yards, and cleared over the field gate into a lane with a slight increase of his lead, which was further increased by the farmer's inability to vault the gate. Jimmy rather hoped, the day being such a hot one, that the farmer's enthusiasm would wane at that point, but he was destined to disappointment. Either the loss of his scarecrow's hat, or the attempt upon his own limbs, had so stirred the farmer's wrath that he had, it seemed, no thought of abandoning the pursuit. The lane was a grass-grown one, and deadened the sound of running, but the heavy breathing in Jimmy's rear was clear warning that he must not stop. Reluctantly, at the next bend in the lane, Jimmy pitched his walking-stick gun over the hedge, and left himself free to solve the problem of his escape with his head and his heels. He would have felt easier if he had known just where the lane came out. A little nearer home he would have been able to take to the fields,

since he knew them all well, and effect some doubling, which would have been much more to his mind than a stern chase, possibly long, but likely to be fatal if the farmer had a good wind.

He had almost made up his mind, having seen the farmer down a long straight bit a minute before, going steadily, that he must try the fields anyhow, and risk getting stuck in a hedge for some time, when the lane suddenly terminated in a road. Ten yards down the road, and standing back a little behind two tall poplars, was an inn, and outside it stood a cart and horse.

Inside the inn, Mr. Boke was sipping his third pint, and at the back of it the pink-faced man was draining his second. Inside the cart was a wardrobe, and inside the wardrobe was Mr. Faviel. Jimmy knew none of these things.

All he knew was that the inn was the "Dun Cow," and stood at the cross-roads about six miles from The Ashlands, and that a cart and horse, driverless, stood there too. Within ten seconds of realizing these facts, Jimmy was in the driver's seat: in fifteen, the horse was cantering down the branch road which led to The Ashlands. This road turned almost instantly at right angles to the way it cut the other road, and it was to this fact that Jimmy, though he did not know it, owed his escape.

The farmer, arriving at the lane's end rather more than a minute behind Jimmy, pulled up. The boy might have dodged in there, or he might have run on.

Deciding that he had better make sure that he had not run on before he examined into the question of whether he had dodged into the inn, the farmer hastened to the cross of the roads some few seconds

after Jimmy had turned the corner in the cart belonging to the "Sow and Pigs."

The sound of wheels in the invisible distance signified nothing to the farmer, who judged that Jimmy, probably at least as blown as himself, could hardly have got out of sight if he had kept to any one of the roads. He therefore dashed across to the inn, and almost into the arms of Mr. Boke, who, having heard the sound of wheels, and imagining some other vehicle had arrived, thought it a wise step to see that no communication took place (though, indeed, none was likely to) between the newcomer and the prisoner of the wardrobe. He had risen leisurely and the entrance of the farmer stopped him.

"Ha' you seen a lad by any chance come in here?" asked that irate person. "Been shootin' at me, the lad has."

"Lor, no!" said Mr. Boke.

The farmer banged on the bar with both his fists.

"Mrs. Cleavin, hi!" he called.

"Lord, Mr. Dunt!" said the landlady, hurrying out. "Whatever be the matter?"

The farmer explained again with the utmost vociferousness.

"I've promised to give un a thrashin', and I will, dang it," he said. "He must ha' run into your garden, Mrs. Cleavin, but I'll ha' un out——"

"Why, you're welcome to look, I'm sure," said the landlady, "but nobody ain't been there save——" She looked at Mr. Boke, and paused. The pink-faced man was still there, quaffing.

"Sure he hasn't got away on one the roads?" said Mr. Boke, his professional interest aroused.

"Well, I looked afore I came in here," said the

wrathful Mr. Dunt. "He can't have had the time, I say."

"We'll take another glimpse," said Mr. Boke, issuing forth in the most friendly way, followed by the landlady and Mr. Dunt. "He might—hullo!" The absence of the cart, which was in no way extraordinary to Mr. Dunt, seeing that it had not been there when he arrived, instantly struck him. "Has my man gone on with that wardrobe?" he asked the landlady sharply.

"Why, sir, no. He ain't." Mrs. Cleavin shook her head deprecatingly. "He's havin' 'arf a pint, sir."

"Then—damnation!" shrieked Mr. Boke, "where is it?"

The sight of a man suddenly brought to a greater pitch of fury than himself slightly mollified Mr. Dunt.

"The lad couldn't, I s'pose," he suggested, "ha' driven the cart off? Now I come to think of it, I did hear wheels in the distance, like."

"Which way?" said Mr. Boke.

"Danged if I remember!" said Mr. Dunt, and Mr. Boke's language was something new to the country.

"I wouldn't expect a man to talk like that," said Mrs. Cleavin later on, when Mr. Boke had departed, almost apoplectic, leaving the pink-faced man dumb with a sense of his sins, "not if some one had stole 'is 'oarded hall. Whereas, it ain't, Mr. Dunt, if you'll believe me, not even 'is own 'orse and cart. That's the 'Sow and Pigs's,' from Waybury. It's only a old wardrobe which 'e bought second-and, and is boun' to turn up agen. I s'pose 'e must be a anticologist, being in such a bluster about a old wardrobe. But, whatever 'e is, 'e ought to be ashamed of 'isself."

CHAPTER XXII

THE OPENING OF THE WARDROBE

It was getting on for twilight when Jimmy drove into The Ashlands, and he estimated that he had earned another three shillings at least. He had been strongly tempted when he first set off with the cart to drive straight home, since the consequences of being arrested red-handed and solitary by the owner of the cart, might, he judged, be even less pleasant than those with which the farmer had threatened him in the first instance.

With characteristic honorableness, however, he had decided that he must make good his four hours' absence, since he had taken money for it, and was prevented from returning the same by the fact that all but half-a-crown had dropped through a hole in his pocket during his smart run with the farmer.

The first thing Jimmy did, therefore, was to divert his horse along a track that led to a favorite spot of his—some underwood going down to the banks of that very stream where he had proposed to his father to try for a kingfisher's nest. It was a peaceful spot, some distance from the road, and concealed from any one, even in the immediate vicinity, by trees. In case of pursuit, Jimmy, by crossing the stream, could attain a good vantage ground, from which either to retire or to defend himself. The opposite bank offered a choice collection of stones.

That he did not abandon the horse and cart was really a testimony to Jimmy's considerateness. He was prepared to abandon it, if pursued; otherwise, he thought, it would be fairer to the driver to convey it to The Ashlands, since, if the man got into a row with his employer for losing it, Sir Jasper would undoubtedly recompense him. Besides, the horse had been of noble assistance to him at a critical moment. He unharnessed it, therefore, and having tethered it in a lush piece of grass, began his researches for a kingfisher's nest. During these, the time had gone so pleasantly that it was not until the pangs of hunger began to assail him, that he thought of getting home.

Thereupon, having re-harnessed the horse, he had driven home, quite uneventfully. It was only as he drew near to the house that the possession of the cart and horse became an embarrassment to him. He did not quite know what to do with them. He was not quite prepared to own up about them immediately, the more so as people appeared to be at dinner, and Jimmy was hungry himself, and did not want to wait about longer than he could help. He had just got down, and was holding the horse's head, reflecting that the horse deserved well of him, and ought to have a feed, when Ropes, the head gardener, came grumbling by.

"What ha' you got there, Master Jimmy?" he asked suspiciously.

"A wardrobe," said Jimmy.

"Another of they theatrical properties, is it?" asked Mr. Ropes, these being his present bugbear. "What do they want with a wardrobe, I'd like to know; isn't there enough rubbish been carted on to the turf, as 'tis, and the clumsy fellows smashing the shrubs as they go by? What it is to be like when the

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mob's been here, Lord knows! Where's the fellow with it, Master Jimmy?"

"I don't know," said Jimmy truthfully. "I thought I'd better hold on to it until somebody came. You might tell some of the men to come and fetch it, if you're passing the stables."

"Where's it to go?"

"On the stage," said Jimmy, at random.

"I'll tell 'em," said Mr. Ropes. "And I'd best stop and see 'em carry it through behind. It makes 'em a bit more careful."

"Do," said Jimmy; and, having watched Mr. Ropes into the stables, departed. A few minutes afterwards, the men who had been fetched by Mr. Ropes to deposit the wardrobe on the open stage in the garden, having fulfilled that duty, also withdrew.

Mr. Faviel, within the wardrobe, drew a deep breath of relief. At last, after an incarceration of some six or seven hours, he knew where he was; and knew also that for some little time to come no one else probably would. How Jimmy had come into possession of him, or why, he did not know. Up to the time when Jimmy had addressed Mr. Ropes, and he had recognized Jimmy's voice, he had had not the most shadowy notion whither he was faring, or under whose charge.

He had guessed, indeed, from the eager way in which Mr. Boke had purchased the furniture which contained him, that the contents of that furniture were not unknown to the purchaser. Therefore, Mr. Boke, whom, of course, he had never seen, even on the first night of his disappearance, must be one of Blenkenstein's agents. Faviel tried to think he recognized the husky voice, but, in any case, there could be little doubt about the man's identity. Where he was taking him

to, was another matter. Faviel knew nothing about Hanging Coppice, or its mill. He was being driven somewhere by this husky-voiced man, and by another from the inn. The other from the inn was not, Faviel gathered from the conversation, aware of the contents of the wardrobe; and it had been in Faviel's mind to try and bribe him to let him out, what time Mr. Boke quenched his thirst at the inn.

He had refrained, out of consideration that, if the man were nearly panic-stricken at hearing a voice come out of the wardrobe he supposed to be empty—as was most likely to be the case—he would rouse every one within reach, and there would be a revelation. Faviel did not want a revelation; it was to avoid one that he had entered the wardrobe. It was in the knowledge that he wanted to avoid one that the man with the husky voice had bought the wardrobe. No; sooner than reveal himself, Faviel felt he must go to this mill, wherever it was.

He was not, in spite of the heat of the day, in any great danger of asphyxiation. Warm it undoubtedly was inside that oaken closet, but the wardrobe, being an old one, had chinks in plenty to let the air through. And there was space to turn round in; enough almost to move about in. Faviel could see through one crack—see blurred things, the green of the hedges, the white of the road, the blue fleece of the sky—in a spasmodically comforting manner. His chief desire was for a drink; and his animosity against his unknown captor was at its keenest when he heard him enter the inn, after giving directions to the other man to keep an eye on the wardrobe.

Jimmy's incursion into the cart had been sheer bewilderment. Faviel had not even been aware that

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the pink-faced man had abandoned his trust, so that when the cart started off at a gallop, he supposed that the journey was still being continued, though he wondered a good deal at the change of pace. Later, he realized, somehow, that he had lost one of his conductors, for there was no more conversation at all—a thing that prevented him from knowing which of the two was still with him. As the afternoon wore on, and Jimmy deposited the cart on the bank of the stream, Faviel had his first touch of genuine uneasiness. The ugly notion took hold of him that perhaps he was to be abandoned in this solitary place—for it sounded solitary, with its noises of birds and running water. It would be an easy enough thing to do. No one but the man who bought him knew him to be inside; and that man, if ever he were brought to justice, could disclaim his knowledge with some show of truth. If he were abandoned, everything depended on whether he could cut the cord that he could see dimly through the crack of the swing door. He had little to do but push the door open then. He had taken his knife out, and ascertained that the handle could be thrust far enough through the crack to enable the blade to cleave the rope, when Jimmy's whistling, mostly out of tune—which was Jimmy's method of self-communing—advised him that he was not abandoned, as he had by this time begun to hope.

He half thought of parleying with the whistler, but again the fear of revealing himself to some one not aware of his presence stopped him; and he relapsed into his squatting posture to await the development of events. He knew now that he could get out if left to himself, and of that there seemed to be more than a chance. He also vowed that somehow or other he

would get out, since, capture or no capture, he had arranged to meet Judith on Sunday afternoon.

Still, a thirst that had become almost anguish must have made him try some quick means of escape, had Jimmy's journey taken longer; and, no sooner had the steps of the men who had borne him on to the stage died away, than his knife was out and he was sawing away at the rope. He had got through one round of it and began on the second when the sound of more steps approaching warned him to cease operations. Then followed the tones of a familiar voice:

"It is a very singular thing," Lady Mallendon was saying, "that girls will be girls—very singular and trying. I remember how greatly tried Sir Jasper was by my behavior when I was a girl myself. Contrariness—it was nothing more. He arranged for instance once, shortly after we were engaged, to take me upon the river in a canoe. The day came—a lovely day—'glorious boating weather,' Sir Jasper called it, if my memory serves me. Yet, you would scarcely believe it, but nothing—positively nothing would induce me to get into the canoe. Sir Jasper, always good-humored, almost lost his temper—he was in a white duck suit—and I do not wonder at it."

"You think, then, that it doesn't mean anything particular?" said Blenkenstein, in a discontented voice.

"Girlishness—mere girlishness," said Lady Mallendon reassuringly. "A girl—a pearl—ah—is it one of Herrick's charming lines?"

"Don't know," said Blenkenstein. "I don't go in for poetry, you know, Lady Mallendon. I suppose I'm too much what's called a business man. I dare say I don't understand it. But anyway, I don't understand Judith. The arrangement was——"

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"Ah, you Efficients," interrupted Lady Mallendon archly. "The arrangement! But can youthful affections be bound by arrangements? They stray—it is their nature; they waver. You must try and see the charm of that, Mr. Blenkenstein."

"It's charming enough," said Blenkenstein sulkily. "I wouldn't mind seeing it in another girl."

"But you don't care for it in Judith?"

"No."

"In that case," said Lady Mallendon, with a gentle hauteur, "perhaps it would be better if what you call the arrangement was given up."

The change of tone startled Blenkenstein as much as it rejoiced Faviel in his wardrobe. The latter knew that Lady Mallendon, in pursuance of a pet idea, would go a good deal further than was wise; but he also knew what Blenkenstein did not, namely, that if her plans did not go smoothly nobody was more likely than Lady Mallendon to give them up entirely and start on a new tack. Blenkenstein, mercenary himself, imagined that Lady Mallendon was bent on the match mainly from the point of view of its financial advantages. People had assured him that he was a catch, and he was disposed to believe it himself, and to believe that Lady Mallendon had more than an inkling of it. He would have been astonished to learn that it was only as the ideal financier that he was fancied.

"What do you mean?" he said quickly.

"I mean that of course, if you are dissatisfied, the idea must be given up," said Lady Mallendon. "Two uncertain people should never marry; and, indeed, I am not sure that it would be for the best for you and Judith to marry in any case—of course I would not

press Judith for a moment, and I am sure you would not."

"But—but," began Blenkenstein, seriously upset, "you don't mean it?"

Lady Mallendon flowed on:

"An honest attempt to understand one another's feelings, to find out if two people's sympathies flow together in the highest channels, is an experience that cannot be wholly wasted."

"But I cannot give her up," said Blenkenstein hoarsely.

Lady Mallendon seemed a little astonished.

"Oh, well, of course," she said graciously, "that is different. I understood—but perhaps it has gone further with you than I thought. Possibly it has with Judith. I do not know. Would it not be wise in that case to test her again?"

"You mean ask her if she will?"

"Yes."

"You haven't really any objection?"

"Oh, not in the least," said Lady Mallendon. "I had quite set my heart on it. Sir Jasper, I know, would be pleased. He is not demonstrative where his sentiments are concerned, but he is devoted to Judith. Still, if you think——"

"I think I'll take your advice," said Blenkenstein, "and ask her again."

"It was a pity," said Lady Mallendon reflectively, "that that Miss Faviel should have turned up so inopportunely the other day, because Judith—well, it is no good thinking of that. I do not suppose Mr. Faviel will ever be heard of again. It is no doubt the last flicker of the candle, poor young man."

They had begun to move away, and Blenkenstein's

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comment was lost. If he could have known that the poor young man was within a few paces of him, eaves-dropping, his comment might have been a strong one.

Faviel waited a few minutes more, listening intently, and then cut the last strands of the rope. He had only to turn back the catch to get out. A sweet, cool smell of myrtle from the shrubbery at the back of the lawn greeted him as he stepped on to the stage. Facing him was the house, its lights gleaming softly. Somewhere inside was Judith. Was Blenkenstein asking her again? For a moment Faviel was tempted by the idea of creeping up to the house, and finding her out somehow or other, and asking her himself. But the risks were too obvious. Already he could discern figures on the lawn: they might come nearer and discover him. He had explored the garden only last night, and it was not without some knowledge of his whereabouts that he slipped off the back of the stage and plunged into the shrubbery. It was so dark in parts that he missed the path he thought he was on, and almost ran into two people who were strolling ahead of him; whereupon he dived into the thickness of the laurels.

The noise he made had not passed unnoticed.

"What's that?" he heard a feminine voice inquire tremulously.

It was Miss Finch who spoke, and she addressed herself to Mr. Wormyer, who had accepted an invitation to stop and dine.

"Could it be a rabbit?" said Mr. Wormyer. His thoughts, due to Jimmy's insinuation, were big and perplexing ones, full of a queer delight.

"It sounded like a man," said Miss Finch. "A—a burglar."

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"Don't be alarmed!" said Mr. Wormyer manfully. "I'll challenge him"—and he proceeded to cry, in his somewhat thin voice: "If any one is in the bushes, I must ask him to come out. He is frightening a lady."

Nobody responding—for Faviel was making his way as fast as possible in the other direction—Mr. Wormyer again implored Miss Finch not to be alarmed.

"I don't think I am," said Miss Finch shyly, "with a man to protect me."

Mr. Wormyer's heart beat high. Could this, he asked himself, be love? He felt as though, single-handed, he was willing to dispose of a tiger.

CHAPTER XXIII

SOME LIGHTS ON A SLEUTH-HOUND

ON Saturday afternoon, going towards Langston Bucket, on the Waybury road, a motor-car might have been seen—and, as a matter of fact, attracted some notice. It contained a lady, two men, and a small fat dog. The driver of the car was Mr. Wilton, and the lady beside him was Miss Faviel, while on the back seat of the car sat Monarch and Mr. Bigstock. The comparative disguise of plain clothes in no way modified the policeman-like austerity of Mr. Bigstock's features, which were, indeed, compressed into rather a more severe mold than usual, from a consciousness of the responsibility that rested upon him, mingled with a fear that he should betray some symptoms of supposing that Monarch was capable of snapping at him.

Mr. Bigstock had protested against Monarch's presence on the car as being unnecessary, and Monarch's similar protest may have been delivered on the same grounds. Tod Wilton had had some difficulty in conciliating both parties; but once they were started, the pleasant speed and refreshing wind had quelled the mutual antagonism, and Monarch and Mr. Bigstock sat together on the hind seat, rolling their eyes and revolving their thoughts in peace.

The objective of the expedition was the Langston Bucket rectory, and to Mr. Bigstock the credit of fixing upon this point was due. When the search for

Miss Faviel's supposed nephew in the "Sow and Pigs" had proved ineffective, and a further reconnaissance of the High Street and its public-houses had met with no success, Mr. Bigstock had been disposed to regard Miss Faviel's statement as the result of a hallucination. He even tried to convince the lady, not only that the groom she had seen was not her nephew, but that she had not even seen any groom. Miss Faviel had countered this proposition by inviting Mr. Bigstock to gain information as to whether a groom in a dogcart had or had not been seen in Waybury at the time she named. It turned out that a groom and a dogcart had been seen, and that moreover the horse attached to the dogcart had, as Miss Faviel averred, run away, but whether with the groom still in it or not there was no saying for certain, as opinions differed. Some people said that the groom, with a pale face, was seen tugging at the reins; one man (a tramp) even contended that as the cart flashed past him, the groom had cried out, "Tell 'em I've done me best, and no man can do more." As the tramp wanted remuneration for this item of intelligence, it was very properly discredited. The theory gained ground that the groom had got out, and actually been in Mr. Green's shop, as Mr. Green had said.

With this clue to guide him, Mr. Bigstock had, in a moment of inspiration, asked whether anybody could say whose the trap was. Lots of people could say that it was a clergyman's, and several people that it was Mr. Warley's, of Langston Bucket. The inference was that the groom was also Mr. Warley's, of Langston Bucket. It was rumored that Mr. Warley had recovered his trap some miles out of Waybury, and it seemed possible that he had also recovered his

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groom. Such at least was Mr. Bigstock's opinion, and he proposed to Miss Faviel that together they should descend on Langston Bucket next day. There was nothing in the way of a horse to carry them there the same evening, but Mr. Bigstock thought he could get hold of a "shay" on Saturday.

Miss Faviel had suggested that she should telegraph for a friend of hers, who was stopping at a village not so very far distant—with a motor-car—to come over and drive herself and Mr. Bigstock to the appointed place. Mr. Bigstock had assented to the plan.

Hence the quartette in the motor-car on the way to Langston Bucket.

Could their thoughts have been analyzed by the people who saw them, those thoughts would have been discovered to be as diverse as the thinkers. Monarch's were dog's thoughts, not translatable into words. Mr. Bigstock moved hazily in a maze of detective reminiscences, mostly drawn from penny novels. In practice he had never had any detective work to do, and he did not somehow at the present moment feel more than superficially like a sleuth-hound on the track. He was convinced, for some reason best known to himself, that the groom was not Miss Faviel's nephew, and he felt rather injured in consequence. He would have liked to grapple with a problem which would tax the wits of the smartest man in Scotland Yard, and he said to himself that he could have done so, if the problem were put before him. But it was not. He intended to browbeat the groom pretty severely when he did see him, and show him plainly that he couldn't try and make people think he was Miss Faviel's nephew without drawing down on himself the watchful eye of the law.

Miss Faviel mingled wonder as to what her nephew Richard could be doing with a sort of humorous indignation at Mr. Bigstock's formidable obtuseness. She had put herself into Mr. Bigstock's clumsy hands, and everything seemed to be slipping away from her in consequence. But surely something could be learned about Richard from this clergyman, if he really was the clergyman whose livery Richard was wearing yesterday. She had no hope of seeing the groom still in his situation. Mr. Wilton also had no hope of seeing him there; or rather, it should be said, that he had the hope of not seeing him there. He trusted that Dick had got safely away, though how he had managed it, if he had done so, there was no guessing. Still, not knowing anything of Mr. Boke's watchfulness or of the affair of the wardrobe, he was not greatly concerned about his friend. He expected that somehow or other Dick would contrive to effect the meeting between Miss Mallendon and himself, which, when Tod had last seen him on this very road two days ago, had seemed to both of them the best plan for putting a spoke in Blenkenstein's wheel.

It was the memory of the minutes shortly before he had discovered Faviel that mostly concerned Mr. Wilton. He was on his way to the rectory again to see the maiden with the blue eyes, whom he had so nearly and brutally run over.

What, Mr. Wilton wondered, did she think of him? The question had been in his mind for the past forty-eight hours, and partly accounted for his being in the car in company with Miss Faviel and the police constable at the present moment.

His intention had been to return to town, and during the brief delirious moments in which he had apologized

to Mr. Warley for having almost killed his daughter, and had accepted a cup of tea from the hospitable hands of Mrs. Warley, he had unfortunately let out that intention. The unfortunate nature of this confession only struck him when he had left the rectory and was on his way to the rendezvous with Faviel. For it came over Mr. Wilton that, having represented himself as a passing motorist from London, he could hardly avoid raising suspicions if he proceeded to do what seemed to him now a much pleasanter thing. This was to put up at an inn for a day or two, so as to be able to call at the rectory again and inquire how Miss Warley was after the shock. It seemed to Tod that to call was the only polite thing to do, the sort of thing that he ought to do; and yet, to pay a call from London, sixty miles distant, would certainly look strange. At least, would it? The opinion of a woman of the world upon this delicate point of etiquette would have been infinitely welcome to the conscientious lieutenant. He thought of asking Faviel's advice, but unselfishly refrained, since Faviel had already enough to think of.

In the end, a bright thought occurred to Mr. Wilton. Why should his car not break down and compel him to put up in the neighborhood? Cars often do break down, and if he represented such an accident to have occurred when he called at the rectory, nobody would think his conduct peculiar. He would, it is true, lose the credit of seeming to call just for the sake of inquiring, but he would be able to call, which was the chief thing.

The thought seemed bright at the moment of its occurrence, but after Mr. Wilton had put up at an inn a few miles nearer London on the Langston Bucket

road, all the old doubts and several new ones cropped up again. He thought it would be deemed officious if he called the next day, as though he wanted to force his acquaintance on them. And if he called, and they were out, he would have lost the opportunity of seeing them again. He could not go on calling. So Tod spent Friday, lounging about the village, to keep up the idea that there was something the matter with the car, and saying to himself that he had now lost the one opportunity of being ordinarily polite that was offered to him, since, if he called later on, they would assume that he could not have been particularly interested in Miss Warley's welfare, or he would have inquired sooner.

He had sent off a letter to Miss Faviel, acquainting her with his change of plans (but not with the reason of them: he said the country was so charming that he had been tempted to stop and explore a little), in case he could be of any further use to that lady.

Her telegram, reaching him about five o'clock on Friday, was a godsend, and sent Mr. Wilton into the seventh heaven until he thought it over, when he instantly perceived a large number of objections to the proposal it contained that he should accompany her to the rectory on the following day. For example, he could not in that case for a moment pretend that he had come to inquire after Miss Etta's state of well-being. It might be revealed to Miss Faviel that he had seen the pseudo-Higginson. The policeman's trained eye might observe his hesitations and contradictions, and discover his guilty acquaintance with Faviel's movements.

Mr. Bigstock's portentous but obviously self-com-

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posing powers of thought relieved him of this last apprehension, though others still weighed upon him, when, turning slowly on his seat so as not to arouse Monarch's animosity, Mr. Bigstock announced, as they entered the village of Langston Bucket—

"First turn on the right, sir. And a few yards on. A white gate. There's likely to be fowls about——"

"Right!" said Mr. Wilton, who had already begun to turn.

"You seem to know it," said Miss Faviel.

"Why," said Mr. Wilton, with a slyness that surprised himself, "this is the same rectory as the one I called at on Thursday. I didn't tell you of the accident I had, did I?" He related it in a few words, as they went up the drive, and Miss Faviel was in the act of saying, "But then you must almost have seen Richard," when Etta appeared at the porch.

"Mr. Wilton!" she said, with a delightful blush of surprise.

"I hope——" Tod began. But Mr. Bigstock saw his opportunity and availed himself of it. He had removed himself with unexpected celerity from his place beside Monarch, and recovered all his wonted dignity.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, holding up his hand, as though to stop any traffic there might be in the neighborhood. "The conduc' of this case having bin put in my hands I must ask you to excuse me. Now, miss," he wheeled round upon Etta, "don't be frightened. But as a matter of lor, miss, is Mr. Warley, rector an' parish priest, inside this here rect'ry?"

"Yes," said Etta, slightly alarmed, in spite of Mr. Bigstock's admonition.

"It's only, my dear," said Miss Faviel, "some questions about my——"

Mr. Bigstock put up his hand at Miss Faviel.

"I must ask you, ma'am, to observe se-creesy in the first instance. For all you know, and for all I know, the prisoner, I should say the gentleman, may be a-listening to your words at this very moment. The young lady, for all you know, ma'am, may be in the conspiracy, if such a conspiracy there be——"

"But why, in the name of goodness, man," said Miss Faviel fractiously, "should there be a conspiracy? If you would ask this young lady first of all if you may see her father, and secondly, if——"

"A-zackly!" said Mr. Bigstock. "We are a-coming to that, ma'am, if you will allow me to say so. But the conduc' of this case being, as I have afore mentioned, in my hands, I shall first of all ask this young woman, or lady aforesaid, where Mr. Warley, rector, may be found and lighted upon——"

"In the library, I think," said Etta with some uneasiness.

"Then," said Mr. Bigstock, "in the name of the lor——"

"Tut!" broke in Miss Faviel. "My dear, what we want to know is if your father will allow us to speak to him for a few minutes——"

"Pray come in," said Etta, adding to Mr. Wilton, "I'm sorry to say our man has disappeared, but if your car is all right by itself——?"

Mr. Wilton nodded, and assisted Miss Faviel down. Etta headed a procession, of which Mr. Bigstock composed the solemn rear, to Mr. Warley's library, and opened the door.

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“I don’t know but what it wouldn’t be safer if summun kept an eye outside,” whispered Mr. Bigstock to Mr. Wilton, as they were about to enter.

“I’ll do it, if you like,” said Tod, and walked back again to the porch.

CHAPTER XXIV

ETTA MAKES A DISCOVERY

MISS FAVIEL's ill-concealed impatience, combined with Mr. Warley's somewhat patronizing way of referring to him as "Constable," prevented Mr. Bigstock from developing the investigation on the strict and awe-inspiring lines which he had contemplated. The discussion, indeed, became more or less a conversation between Miss Faviel and the rector—a conversation in which Mr. Bigstock's pertinent queries were treated with scant respect.

Mr. Warley was genuinely interested in his late groom's case.

"I never read the information you say was in the papers about his disappearance in the first instance, or I might have connected Higginson—Mr. Faviel, as I ought to call him—with it. As it happened, I took him on trust, and, if you'll allow me to say so, a better groom I never wish to have."

"Richard," said Miss Faviel regretfully, "always was reliable."

"You consider, then," said Mr. Bigstock, "that the young man was this lady's nephew?"

"Well, Miss Faviel says she recognized him," said Mr. Warley. "I see no reason against it, do you?"

"Where did he git, then?" said Mr. Bigstock doggedly. "If he was the gentleman, where did he git?"

"That, I imagine," said Mr. Warley dryly, "is what you have to find out," and Mr. Bigstock collapsed.

"Of course," Mr. Warley resumed, "my knowledge of him terminates just where yours begins. From the time he entered the shop——"

"As I was certain he did," said Miss Faviel.

"Arterwards being traced to the 'Sow an' Pigs,'" said Mr. Bigstock feebly.

"Very doubtfully traced," Miss Faviel added.

"I saw nothing whatever of him. The horse had run away, and like a good many other people, I ran after it. My assumption was that Higginson would do the same. The horse was stopped about two miles out of Waybury. Luckily there was no damage done to any one, and the horse itself had only strained one of his legs. I thought the best thing to be done was to leave him at the inn there, where, as a matter of fact, he still is. After that I walked home, having first ascertained that Higginson had not come up. I must confess I was considerably annoyed with him for having left the horse like that, which your explanation, Miss Faviel, of course makes a good deal clearer. Still, I was not dreaming of dismissing him, or anything of that sort. I still thought he would turn up, a little ashamed of himself, perhaps, but I was beginning to lose hope of it when you arrived——"

"Then it's to be taken, is it," asked Mr. Bigstock, with a show of prudent doubting, "that he ain't on the premises?"

"Obviously," said Miss Faviel. "Do you doubt Mr. Warley's word——?"

"He might 'a' crept back—to die," said Mr. Bigstock, with a faint recollection of some incident he had heard of somewhere.

"Well," said Mr. Warley, smiling, "you're quite welcome, constable, to examine the premises if you like."

"Thanky, sir," said Mr. Bigstock. "Chimbleys have hid things afore now."

"So I believe," said Mr. Warley. "I'll ring for the housemaid, and ask her to let you see them all, and after that you could have a glass of beer, perhaps, in the kitchen."

"Thanky, sir," said Mr. Bigstock again. "None o' the maids, I suppose, couldn't a bin in league with the gentleman?"

"What sort of league?"

"Conspiring agen the King's peace," said Mr. Bigstock, in a general way.

"I hardly think so. But you'd better ask them yourself," said Mr. Warley. "Here's Mary. Mary, this is the Waybury police-constable, and he wants to be shown the chimneys, if you'll be good enough to point them out, and afterwards get him a glass of beer."

"Thanky," said Mr. Bigstock, and followed the beaming housemaid with unreluctant steps.

"I thought," said Mr. Warley apologetically, "that perhaps we should get on more quickly if your Sherlock Holmes retired. I am sure there are lots of questions you would like to ask about your nephew, and we should be delighted to answer. Etta, there's your mother just coming back. Ask her to come in and help us."

"And Mr. Wilton?" said Etta.

"Oh, yes, pray bring him in," said Mr. Warley. "What a curious coincidence that he should be a great friend of Higginson's—Mr. Faviel's, I mean—and

only a day or two ago should have brought Etta in from a fall. Why, bless my soul, that was on Thursday, Etta, wasn't it? He might very well have discovered his friend and saved you all this worry, Miss Faviel. What a complicated business! A very nice young man Mr. Wilton seemed to be—for a motorist."

"He is," said Miss Faviel.

Etta sent her mother bustling in—not quite certain whether Higginson had turned out to be a burglar or an angel—easily enough. But when she approached Mr. Wilton with the request that he also should enter, there seemed to be a disinclination on that gentleman's part. He did not actually say so, but fussed round the car, busying himself with several little things, and talking rapidly the while.

"It's the worst of a hired car. Everything goes wrong."

"Is it the same one?" Etta asked. She had on a floppy garden hat, and looked charming as she stroked Monarch, still lolling on the back seat.

Mr. Wilton nodded.

"I'd like to smash it to bits," he said. "And you, are you really all right again?"

"Why, of course," said Etta, laughing. "I never was wrong, you know."

"I meant," said Mr. Wilton, "to call yesterday and ask how you were. I was uncommonly anxious."

"I thought you were going on to London," said Etta innocently.

"I was," said Mr. Wilton, "but—I—didn't——"

"And now," said Etta, "you've had to come about your friend. It does seem curious that Higginson should really have been a friend of yours all the time."

"Doesn't it?" Mr. Wilton agreed.

"And that you shouldn't have recognized him when you did see him."

Mr. Wilton looked up guiltily from an inspection of one of the back tires. Etta looked supremely innocent.

"Ye—yes," said Mr. Wilton.

"I suppose, as my father says, it would have saved a good deal of worry if you had recognized him?" Etta was looking at Monarch as she spoke, but there was something in her tone that warned Tod that prevarication would not do.

"I don't know that it would have saved worry," he admitted.

"Then you did recognize him?"

"Yes."

Etta's eyes sparkled with triumph. She felt that she, and she alone, had known from the first that Higginson was no mere groom, and now, from that chance exclamation that Mr. Wilton had let fall when he drove her up to the rectory two days before, she had inferred what neither her father nor Miss Faviel, nor that stupid policeman had even so much as thought of—the fact, namely, that Mr. Wilton was cognizant of his friend's disguise. She forgot that she had given up all thought of Higginson's being anything beyond what he professed to be, and she also presumed that her discovery gave a title to know more than she actually did of this interesting and mysterious affair. Mr. Wilton's reply to her next remark was really annoying.

"I think I have the right to know exactly what it all means," said Etta arbitrarily.

"I'm awfully sorry," said Mr. Wilton, "but I can't tell you."

The insufferable thing about this answer was that he spoke it as if he meant it. Etta had supposed, from

her small experience of him, that Mr. Wilton was a most amenable person.

"Oh!" she said coldly.

"I'd tell you if I could," said Mr. Wilton earnestly, "but I haven't the right to."

"Pray don't trouble about it," said Etta, with a pout.

"You don't mind?"

"Why should I?" Etta asked. "The only thing is that I think I ought to tell Miss Faviel of what I know about it. She is naturally interested in her nephew's disappearance."

She spoke lightly and provokingly, because she had been provoked. She had not thought so often of Mr. Wilton (owing to rehearsals and other things that took up her attention) as she had expected to: certainly much less often than he had thought of her. Absence rather tends to weaken the impressionable, since it cannot confirm the impression. Still, when Mr. Wilton arrived again, she was prepared to renew her previous fancies, in which, it will be recalled, he figured as a devoted knight, as devoted as Higginson had not been. Devoted knights do not say, in response to a request that is almost a command for enlightenment, what Mr. Wilton was saying now.

"I must ask you to tell Miss Faviel nothing about it."

"Why?" said Etta rebelliously.

"You'll promise?"

If Mr. Wilton's other manner of looking away at his car and stuttering had been his manner at this moment, Etta would not have begun to make a promise. She had right on her side, and almost duty, and maiden's caprice and maiden's wilfulness. But he was

looking at her with level eyes, and his voice was quite hard.

"Very well," said Etta, in the meekest voice, and, without seeing the picture as plainly as she generally did see these pictures of her fancy, felt like one of those devoted maidens, who, to win the careless attention of the splendid knight, put on page's attire, and in that humble guise follow him along the rough road of pilgrimage and war.

Somehow it was a pleasant sensation, and Mr. Wilton, as unconscious as any splendid knight that he had caused it, added to it by merely giving a commonplace nod, as though to say this was what he had expected, and what he had expected would of course be carried out.

"Some day," he said, "I hope to be able to tell you all about it, and then you'll understand why I couldn't tell you now."

"Yes," said Etta.

"I don't quite know when," said Mr. Wilton. "In fact," he suddenly resumed his old apologetic manner, "I'm talking as if I lived here and knew you well, which of course I don't."

"No," said Etta.

"Do you think," Mr. Wilton flushed quite red with the idea of the momentousness of the question, "that Mr. Warley—your father—I mean you—all of you, would mind if I called one day?"

"I expect my father would be delighted," said Etta.

"Well, I will," said Mr. Wilton, with determination. "I shall be stopping about here for a few days—I expect so, at least—I really don't know, but anyhow, if you don't mind, I can come up from town. It's only a few minutes—hours, distant, isn't it?"

"I suppose you're not going to the garden party at Lady Mallendon's on Saturday, are you?" Etta said. "It's public, you know, for a charity. It might be worth seeing."

"Will you be there?" asked Mr. Wilton eagerly.

"Yes."

"I certainly shall," said Tod. He had no time to say more, for Miss Faviel, who had gathered all possible details from Mr. and Mrs. Warley concerning her nephew, was coming out. Otherwise, Mr. Wilton might have explained that he knew the Mallendons, and Etta might have informed him that she was acting in the play, and that the princess in that drama was a friend of hers, and was indeed coming over to lunch next day. Faviel, in his brief interview with Mr. Wilton, had not entered into particulars, and the intercourse between the rectory and The Ashlands was accordingly hidden from Tod. It is doubtful, even if he had known of it, whether he could have done anything in the way of warning Etta not to prejudice Faviel's case with Miss Mallendon.

"Well," Miss Faviel was saying, as she came out, "I shall stay in Waybury a few more days to see if I can hear anything of poor Richard. He must, of course, be off his head; but at any rate it's a relief to know that he did nothing very peculiar when he was with you, Mrs. Warley. It's very kind of you to have told me what you could, and to have treated him as you did."

"Not at all, not in the least," said Mr. Warley. "The best groom I ever had. Not a moment's anxiety while he was here. To think that he is a distinguished traveler!"

"Was he?" Etta whispered to Mr. Wilton, and Mr. Wilton nodded.

"If we can do anything to assist you," Mr. Warley continued, "pray let us know, and if you should have good news I should esteem a line a favor."

"I will send one with pleasure," said Miss Faviel. "Quiet, Monarch. These are friends."

Monarch subdued his high-pitched challenge of Mr. Warley to a grumbling croak, calculated to assure him that nothing would happen if Mr. Warley did not presume further. He returned to the more furious yap, however, as Mr. Bigstock, with a black smear down the bridge of his nose and watery eyes, came upon the scene.

"Well, constable," said Mr. Warley, "any discoveries?"

"Why, sir," said Mr. Bigstock, "he ain't suttently up the chimbleys, so fur as I can see, without a broom or anything o' the kind, and argying from the soot, there ain't been anybody up within the las' three weeks. Some of us might argy to as much as four weeks, but I wouldn't go not further than three myself. There's a lot o' soot accumerlated in a chimbley in three weeks."

"So it seems," said Miss Faviel unkindly.

"The maids," continued Mr. Bigstock, unaware of the reference, "ain't seen the gentleman later than what you've seen 'em yourself. O' course that ain't argyment, not as we counts it. Why! they ain't trained to see. No reflection, sir," added Mr. Bigstock magnanimously, "on your maids, which are a tidy lot, and frank-spoken as I could wish. But scrubbing, parlor dusting, and preparing vittles for the table do not train the eye."

"So you've got no clue?"

"Not, sir," said Mr. Bigstock with dignity, "what we would call a clue. One or two idees I may have picked up, but you'll excuse me for not a-mentioning of them in public like. I may foller them or I may not. One thing I would wish to say; I ain't had the time I could ha' wished, but if you have a tidy-sized trunk anywheres, under a bed or wash-hand stand, I'd look in it. It ain't pleasant to think of, but bodies have been found in trunks afore now."

"We'll examine the trunks," said Mr. Warley.

"Shoo, dog, shoo!" said Mr. Bigstock, clambering up on to his seat beside Monarch, and stiffening his knees to make them harder to bite.

"Ready?" asked Mr. Wilton.

"Yessir——"

Somewhat regretfully Mr. Wilton started his car on the return journey to Waybury. He could not see Miss Etta Warley again for a week.

CHAPTER XXV

THE TRIUMPH OF MR. BOKE

JUDITH drove herself over to Langston Bucket after morning church. It is to be feared that Mr. Wormyer's efforts in the pulpit, though they might well have called forth the Bishop's famous remark to Mr. Bayford—"The diocese is not without its preacher, Bayford: the diocese is not without its preacher"—were entirely wasted so far as this young lady was concerned.

Doubt had been the subject of Mr. Wormyer's sermon. Doubt—Mr. Wormyer said—was a vice which had caused more unhappiness than any other. A man should be able to make up his mind once and for all. So—Mr. Wormyer added—carried on the flood of his own eloquence, should a woman. It may be that he had in his mind's eye the incident of the shrubbery on Friday night; it may be—though he did not glance that way—that he saw Miss Finch herself, looking pensive in a baby hat. Together—Mr. Wormyer concluded—together in one fixed faith, man and woman might face whatever should betide them.

Mrs. Baggle, a deaf old lady who had once kept the grocer's shop at Hetchingham, and was assiduous in her attendance at church, said to a friend at the conclusion of the service that she "a'most wished she had brought her ear trumpet."

She considered it wasteful to use that instrument except on special occasions.

Doubt had also been the subject of Judith's thoughts. She did not doubt any longer whether she was going to attend the tryst in the woods inside The Ashlands. She only doubted what she should say to Mr. Faviel when she saw him. The old struggle between her inclinations and her sense of what was fit—between what she felt that she desired, and what she thought that she ought to desire—had renewed itself more violently than ever. Why, when her opinion of Mr. Blenkenstein had not altered, should her liking have strayed elsewhere? Had she never liked Mr. Blenkenstein, and never had cause to think badly of Mr. Faviel? She could not, having a clear mind to her undoing, answer "never" to either question. Etta would have been able to. She had the faculty of regarding her latest mood as the safest and most constant in the world.

Judith sat in judgment on herself impartially, no matter how skilled an advocate the moment's emotion should prove. But a judge can only pronounce sentence; he cannot carry it out. In the very teeth of the verdict, the guilty prisoner that is oneself goes on its way, if not rejoicing, at least perilously expectant of delight.

Judith was bound for the Langston Bucket rectory precisely because it took her away from Blenkenstein, and made the afternoon's appointment more easy to accomplish. She intended to send on the groom with the horse when she should have reached The Ashlands lodge on her return journey; telling him that she would walk the rest of the way.

Rain had fallen during church time, laying the dust on the road and bringing forth all the sweets of the meadows and hedgerows. The air smelt of honey-

suckle and tasted of wine. The birds made it ring again with their redoubled singing. Bees were hurrying round to see if their workshops, the flowers, were dry enough for re-entry. Judith's horse flew without a flick of the whip. Only the little groom, tightly cased in his livery, seemed impervious to the changed beauty of the weather, and sat duty-bound with folded arms, as some grooms would sit during an earthquake.

Judith had a mind to make him get down and race her, and only refrained because when the idea occurred to her the white gate of the rectory was already in sight, and Etta with it.

"How nice of you to come!"

"Didn't I promise?" said Judith.

"Yes, but some people don't keep their promises," said Etta. "With all those people in the house I was afraid you wouldn't be able to get away. If I were Mr. Blenkenstein——"

"Never mind about him," said Judith quickly, and Etta marveled. Every one at The Ashlands seemed to know and to say that the engagement between Judith and Mr. Blenkenstein was an accomplished thing, not made public yet, merely because it sometimes pleases engaged couples not to make their understanding public immediately, as though it were too big a secret to be intrusted suddenly and entire to a thoughtless world. Etta supposed it was so. She did not greatly care for Mr. Blenkenstein, what she had seen of him. He could not act at all. But he was a big fine-looking man, and very rich and important, Etta understood, so that perhaps his acting did not very much matter.

For Judith, on the other hand, Etta had conceived

the strongest regard. She admired her beauty and her acting, and her princess-like bearing which was not only that of a stage princess, but of a born one, and made Etta feel rather a country maid, with a complete whole-heartedness, which she made no effort to conceal.

Etta had not a particle of jealousy about her, but a reckless manner of bestowing her affections. Judith was, in short, the friend she had wanted all her life, so perfectly admirable that one felt oneself the better for just sitting at her feet.

"Very well. I'll talk of anything you like. Isn't it a lovely day? No, I won't get in. I'll walk beside you. Do tell father that you've noticed that clump of delphiniums on the left. He's fearfully proud of it. Have you heard our news? No! Well, I'll tell you when we get in. Jem!"

Jem Mole, who had been restored to his former post, after coming in person and promising to turn over a new leaf in it (a promise he had spoilt somewhat by saying he supposed they "wanted summun anyways, now the Lunnoner had run away." The rector had been very sharp with him for daring to entertain this supposition). Jem Mole, then, came forth in response to this call, and was ordered to show Judith's retainer the coach-house, and look after him generally.

There was so little time before lunch, which had been specially delayed in honor of Judith's visit, that it was not until they had sat down to it, and the conversation, after passing from Homer and gardening to recipes for raspberry wine and theatricals, had begun to languish, that Judith bethought herself of what Etta had said, and asked innocently—

"What was *the* news you were going to tell me?"

"It was about our disappearing groom, for a sixpence, Etta?" said the rector in a sporting mood.

Etta nodded.

"A disappearing groom?" said Judith.

"Who called himself Higginson," said Mrs. Warley, anxious to bear her part. "But whose real name was,—there, Etta, I've forgotten it again."

"Faviel," said Etta.

"What name did you say?" If Judith had spoken quickly in reply to Etta's mention of Mr. Blenkenstein, she spoke ten times more quickly now. Nobody but Etta, however, noticed it.

"Faviel," said the rector. "F—A—V—I—E—L. A good Norman name, I should say, and one that, for the sake of euphony, I should myself prefer to Higginson. However, for some reason or other, which as yet remains to be found out, the young man, who is, by the way, one of the pleasantest young men I have met, and an excellent groom" (Mr. Warley could not refrain from giving this testimonial), "preferred to adopt the alias, and also to change his profession, which was, I understand, that of a traveler—an exploring traveler, I should say, and not what is understood as such on what, I believe, is technically known as 'the road'—for that of odd man here. Etta, I see," continued the rector, suddenly called to a consideration of other people's feelings in the matter, "is burning to tell you the story herself. So is my wife, ha! May I give you another slice of mutton?"

Judith hardly knew if she had the other slice of mutton or not. She was eating apple tart before the facts known to the Warleys concerning Mr. Faviel were all before her, and she had recovered her out-

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ward composure sufficiently to say, in reply to a sudden recollection on the part of the rector,

"Yes, it was from our house he disappeared. We knew Mr. Faviel quite well. He is very nice."

It sounded a strange thing to be saying, but Judith said it in the most serene voice.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Warley, duly interested by this new item of information. "Every one seems to know our late groom, and to like him. Etta, I believe, was quite in love with him."

It was one of those jocular remarks of which the maker is the last person to perceive the point. Etta, whom it hit rather unpleasantly, had the misfortune to blush, aware that Judith's eyes were fixed on her.

"Mr. Faviel seems to have taken a most pleasant situation," said Judith ironically, and Mr. Warley was convinced that she appreciated his humor.

"One of the most curious things about the whole thing," said Mr. Warley, "is that a friend of Mr. Faviel's, a Mr. Wilton, happened to call here—another story, as the novelist says—in a motor-car which he must have left in his friend's keeping without ever recognizing who he was."

"Really?"

"Yes," said Mr. Warley, "an instance, I should say, of how unobservant most of us are of those who minister to our wants. Our friend's coachman, we say, and scarcely look at him."

It was after lunch, and when Etta had carried her friend into the garden, that Judith harked back to this point. Etta had had an unpleasant conviction that she would, and recognized almost her own words to Mr. Wilton, when Judith spoke.

"It does seem very curious that Mr. Wilton shouldn't have recognized Mr. Faviel."

"Doesn't it?" said Etta uneasily.

"Did he say that he didn't recognize him?"

"He—he didn't say it," said Etta. "At least, not to me. But he—he certainly tried to convey the impression." She felt a horrible hypocrite. Why Judith wanted to know about it, she had no means of telling; nor why she was so eager. Could it be—the idea came quite suddenly—could it be that Higginson accounted in some way for Judith's disinclination to talk about Mr. Blenkenstein? Could there have been something between him and Judith? Was there something still? The idea came all hot to Etta, and explained, or seemed at the moment to explain, the look Judith had thrown her when her father made that silly remark at lunch-time.

"Of course it was all nonsense what my father said," she burst out precipitately, and wished she hadn't.

"What was that?" Judith inquired.

"About my being in love with Mr. Faviel."

"Perhaps it was the other way about," said Judith pleasantly, "and Mr. Faviel was in love with you. What a lovely color those lilies are!"

Poor Etta was no match for this sort of coolness. She had hoped to be acting kindly by blurting out that information, but it sounded as though there were no subject in the world which possessed less interest for Miss Mallendon than the subject of Higginson.

"Yes, aren't they?" said Etta, and kept to lilies and such things for the rest of the visitor's stay.

To Judith, though she was too generous to show it, the conversation, in its new channel, was the most

tedious she had ever carried on. Not that she would have returned to the subject of Higginson. She had dismissed it, because she could not bear to hear more of it. She was not jealous. She could not be jealous of this simple, friendly girl, who had sought her for a friend. But supposing it were true that Mr. Faviel had fallen in love with Etta. It would be an easy thing for a man to do, Judith supposed. Etta was pretty and innocent. A man might fall in love with prettiness and innocence surely without any harm done.

But in that case the man should say so. Perhaps he meant to. Perhaps it was for that he had asked her to meet him. He realized, no doubt, that he had given her, Judith, reason to suppose that, other things being equal, other girls not being more charming, she might expect to hear from him. Here, then, was a charming girl, whom he had somehow lighted on, and he meant to tell her so. No, no, he would not dare. He would have the grace at least not to intrude upon her heart again. She could strike a man who should offer such a blow to her pride as that—— Besides, it was not like him. He might be heedless, he was not lacking in all decency. Yet why should he have lived as a servant all this time at the rectory, if there were no such inducement as the rector's daughter? And why, when he had spent a fortnight or more within easy distance of communication, should he have delayed to communicate with her until now, when the communication was to be made in secret?

The irrepressible hopes that had sprung up in Judith's heart faded to nothing, as the afternoon wore on, and she had never felt more hopeless than when she took the reins in her hand for the return journey.

As if in sympathy with her mood, the day that had been so bright after the morning's shower had gloomed; and heavy clouds had begun to form in the more distant sky.

"Almost," said the rector, "like thunder. You're sure you won't wait, and see if it's going to pass over?"

Judith thanked him and declined, pleading guests to be entertained.

"I expect I shall get in before the rain comes, anyhow," she said. "Good-by, and you will let me have some of those delphinium seeds, won't you? Good-by, Mrs. Warley, and thank you so much. Farewell, my maid!"

"Farewell, princess!" said Etta, and Judith drove off under cover of an outward show of cheerfulness. The rector remarked that he had rarely seen a more favorable type of the modern young lady, and went off to make a note of "delphinium seeds for Miss Mallendon" in his garden book.

The rain came on, unluckily, some little time before Judith reached The Ashlands. Unluckily, because her plan of getting out there and letting the groom drive on, since she meant to walk back for the sake of the exercise, was made a good deal less ingenious thereby. It sounded so unlikely that she would want to stroll home by the woods in a driving rain with no umbrella. It added to her humiliations to have to make up such a tale, but since her ingenuity had departed from her—with everything else, it seemed—and she could think of nothing else to say, she said it with what spirit she could. The groom, being young, ventured on no remonstrance, and only asked if he should send some one with a wrap to meet her, which Judith forbade.

She descended on the road, and waited there till the dogcart had passed the lodge gates. There were two ways into the woods which Mr. Faviel had appointed for the meeting place; one a turning out of The Ashlands drive, the other a footpath beyond the lodge gates that led through fields into the coverts. Judith chose the latter, in order that she might not encounter any of the Ashlands people. Besides, she was far less likely to meet any one at all on the road at this time (it was getting towards six o'clock) than she was inside the gates. So she thought, and was annoyed to see a young man coming towards her almost as soon as she crossed the stile into the first field.

He was a young man, whose Sunday clothes rather added to than detracted from his air of disreputability, and he wore his bowler hat at a rakish angle unknown to those parts. It seemed to Judith that she recognized him, though where she had seen him before or who he was she could not remember. In any case, he was not a young man with whom she would have wanted any conversation, and she was hurrying on, not displeased to know that he was going in the opposite direction, when he stopped dead in front of her.

"Beg your parding, miss," he said. "But might I arst you to do me a bit of a favor if it ain't botherin' you too much?"

"What do you want?" asked Judith.

"Why," said the young man, "I wants something which, as our nashernal poet 'appily puts it, waits for no feller, the time—miss."

Judith pulled out her watch, knowing that if it was her watch this unpleasant young man was after, it was too conspicuous in any case to be concealed.

"Five minutes to six," she said. She had timed herself to be at the trysting place at the exact time. Since she was bound thither—which was the great submission—she had determined to be minutely obedient to her instructions.

"Thank'ee, miss. You 'ave," said the young man, with a flourish of his bowler hat that was in itself an impertinence, "you 'ave, miss, supplied a long-felt want, my own ticker being at the jooler's, which, under the circs, would 'a' been orkid, but for your hoppor-tune arrival. The circs, I may say," he continued—Judith remained silent—"is that my young woman—the gel, in fact, with which I am walkin' hout, promised 'er muvver to do a Sunday School or a Band of 'Ope at seven punct, and do it she will. But, naterally, she don't want to cut short our pleasink little jaunt afore dooty calls. I lef' the maiden all forlorn under them spreadin' chestnut trees, and to 'er I must return."

Whereupon, with another flourish, the young man turned and preceded Judith down the path leading to the woods.

Had he been a more rough-looking man, Judith would have gone on without delay. But his oily impudence was so disgusting to her in her present frame of mind, and so likely to be renewed, she fancied, if she gave him the opportunity, that she turned back and got on the road again. If the man's story was true, he and the girl would probably go soon. She strode about impatiently for five minutes, and then, incapable of any more delay, walked swiftly to the woods. She found the glade Mr. Faviel had appointed easily enough, and for a little was consoled for Mr. Faviel's non-appearance by the fact that the young

man and his girl were not there. She walked to and fro, thinking "He will surely come soon."

It was a cheerless place, the glade, in that weather. The great trees, thick with summer, dripped heavily, and the black clouds overhead made an early twilight of the scene. Judith in her thin frock, already soaked, began to shiver. She was not conscious of being cold; only of being dully impatient. She looked at her watch every now and then. Twenty minutes past six; five and twenty past; half-past; twenty to seven. She would not look for some time again, and moved up and down under the drenching sky like a cat behind bars.

Five minutes to seven. For five desperate minutes longer she stayed there; then she turned and went away.

She had come so swiftly, but she went away with slow steps and a bowed head. She went by the other path, and came out in the drive leading to the house. A man was hurrying down it, with a cloak under his arm, and an umbrella up.

"Judith!" said Blenkenstein. "My dear child, but you're wet through. Where have you been?"

"I thought I'd walk home," said Judith weakly.

"Your man told me you'd got down—in the rain—and I've been looking for you ever since. Put this on."

Blenkenstein's manner, due largely to his anxiety to know if Judith had met Faviel, and if, as a consequence, Mr. Boke's plans had miscarried, seemed to her unusually ardent. She submitted to put on the cloak and take his arm. She felt grateful to him for not scolding her or questioning her.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE ARRIVAL OF BUTT

THE late morning post brought Mr. Blenkenstein a letter while he was strolling with Lady Mallendon, Miss Finch, O'Levin, and Jimmy round the garden before lunch. He looked so radiant when he had opened it that Lady Mallendon, who was engaged in opening a telegram that had come for her at the same time, could not help remarking upon it.

"Is it good news?" she said. "I'm not curious to know what it is, of course. But I do like to know that people have received good news. One so seldom does by post. I don't know why, I'm sure. I always write the most hearty letters myself, but I never receive them."

"Oh, my news is excellent, thank you," said Blenkenstein, "excellent!" It was indeed a letter from Mr. Boke to say that his plans had not miscarried.

"I expect," said Miss Finch, "that Mr. Blenkenstein has made a hundred thousand pounds—by buying ruby-mines or something of that sort." Miss Finch was a little vague about financial operations.

"Only ten thousand," said Blenkenstein, with a significant glance at O'Levin.

"Sure?" said the latter, with a frown.

"Pretty positive," said Blenkenstein.

"Well, ye don't deserve it," said O'Levin with a

frown. He could not help guessing what Blenkenstein meant, and regretted more than ever that he had helped him to Faviel's undoing. He ought never to have given that dinner.

"What this telegram of mine means," said Lady Mallendon, who had succeeded in getting it out of the wrapper—"I really don't know—can any one tell me, listen—'Mumpers bosh only an old gland uppish, doc says no infection. Coming along to-day if will have me—BUTTER.' It sounds most extraordinary."

"Why, it's young Butt," said Jimmy, not without eagerness. "He's going to come to-day. Probably started."

"But I thought he was suffering from mumps?"

"Don't you see? he says that was bosh. He's only got swelled up—toothache, I dare say."

"Well, I'm sure that's very nice for you, Jimmy," said Lady Mallendon—"if it really isn't infectious. He would arrive this afternoon, wouldn't he? One of Jimmy's greatest friends," she explained at large, "who was supposed to have mumps, but hasn't, it seems. A very nice kind-hearted boy, didn't you say, Jimmy?"

"Don't remember saying it," said Jimmy. "Young Butter's all right if you leave him alone and don't ask him to hand tea-cakes and that sort of thing. He doesn't care for women much."

"I hope he won't make you a misogynist," said Lady Mallendon, a little anxiously.

"Oh, he doesn't insist upon it for other people," said Jimmy, adding—lest Butt's dislike of social life should cause him to be underestimated—"He's a jolly good place-kick."

"Oh, that is nice," said Lady Mallendon.

"And plays for the second," said Jimmy impressively.

"Bit of a sportsman, then," said O'Levin.

"Do you think," said Lady Mallendon, who liked to consult the tastes of her guests, "that he would like to play for the second here? I don't quite know what playing for the second is," she added hastily, observing Jimmy's brows lower.

"It's 'Rugger' in this case," said Jimmy shortly.

"I thought," said Lady Mallendon, "that it might be something like tip-cat. There is a set of tip-cat you used to play with, Jimmy, up in the box-room. I'm sure it's there, because Mrs. Rogers asked me, only the other day, what she should do with it. We could get it out if you think Butt would enjoy a game."

"Look here, mater," said Jimmy, coloring, from consciousness that O'Levin's features were preternaturally taut and strained, "if you'll leave young Butter to me, it'll be all right. Otherwise, I can't answer for him."

"Very well," said Lady Mallendon submissively, "just as you please. I only thought——"

"Yes, I know," said Jimmy, "but you needn't bother to."

O'Levin good-naturedly started a brisk conversation at this point with Miss Finch, thus saving Jimmy's feelings, always liable to be adversely affected when his mother made mistakes, as she generally did, in school and sporting matters, particularly if other people were present.

Butt arrived in time for tea, and turned out to be a boy of Jimmy's age and height, but heavily built, with a large head and a persecuted look, which, at

sight of the large numbers of people he was expected to confront, increased to a positively hounded expression. Lady Mallendon, who had been looking up a school-list and had discovered his Christian name to be Augustus, completed his discomfiture by addressing him under this title.

"If I'd known," he gloomily remarked to Jimmy after tea, "that you had all these people stopping here, I wouldn't have come."

"They don't matter," said Jimmy, "we don't have to see any more of them than we want to. Some of them aren't bad, you know, if you take them in the right way. Let's go and fish now."

A couple of hours at this manly and sequestered sport, rewarded as they were by several roach and a bream weighing over a pound, restored Butt's spirits sufficiently to admit of his making up for what he had lost at tea during the dinner hour. Jimmy had had the foresight to place his friend between himself and Judith—with a request to Judith not to worry him, and with the result that much to his own surprise Butt found himself chatting quite affably before the meal was halfway through. Judith showed an amazing intelligence in listening to accounts of matches, of the mean advantages taken by masters against boys of a modest but not energetic temperament, and of the triumphant retaliations sometimes effected by the gentle victims upon their tyrants.

The conversation was a relief to Butt, and it was also a relief to Judith, inasmuch as it saved her from having to listen perpetually to her right-hand neighbor, Mr. Blenkenstein. She had scarcely spoken with him since he met her in the drive the evening before, and it was her one desire not to be hurried into break-

ing the silver silence. Sometime, she knew, she would have to speak and answer him. It was expected of her and rightly. But she wanted to delay till the last inevitable moment. She had given up thought of Mr. Faviel, or thought she had. She had no desire to explain his absence from the glade; she was content to accept it, as something that fate had brought about for the best. They were not destined to see one another and speak with one another, it seemed: and it was well. She kept her thoughts to herself, and felt almost a mild hilarity in Butt's conversation. That youth admitted to Jimmy that his cousin was one of the decentest girls he'd ever met.

Judith further impressed the unsusceptible Butt on the morning of the following day, Tuesday, when three times in five minutes she bowled him out at Jimmy's private nets—at the far end of the lawn—with a medium to fast over-arm ball that had no suspicion of a chuck in it.

"You keep a jolly good length," said Butt, astonished, as his center stump went down for the third time.

"I'm afraid I shouldn't come off in a match," said Judith modestly.

"Well, of course, match-play is rather different," Butt admitted. "Girls haven't got the nerve for it as a rule. Shall I give you a few balls, now——?"

"No, thank you," said Judith. "I'm quite useless at batting, and I should funk you, I'm sure."

"I don't know. I'm not so fast. Still I shouldn't like to hurt you," Butt said. "I wish my cousins were as good as you. I should get some practice, if they were. I dare say you can sprint a bit," he added, with a dispassionate admiration of Judith's figure.

She laughingly admitted that she could a little, and covered her shyness at Master Butt's undisguised compliments by asking what he and Jimmy were going to do that afternoon.

"Going for a walk," said Jimmy, and intimated by a wink at his friend that no further confidence need be exchanged.

The walk upon which Jimmy had decided was one which he had had in mind for two or three days past. It will be remembered that in escaping from Mr. Dunt, he had of necessity to throw away the comparatively new weapon which had occasioned the farmer's ire. Jimmy had cast it with a good deal of care behind a hedge with a view to future discovery. He had not so far gone back after it, partly because there was a chance of re-encountering the farmer, which, alone and unaided, was not to be risked, partly because the carter, whose horse and cart still stood in Sir Jasper's stable, might also be waiting about there.

It was a curious thing that nobody had come to inquire about them—or the wardrobe—and Jimmy had begun to think that he could not have been spotted going off with it, as he had supposed in the first instance to be the case. At The Ashlands his connection with them had not been suspected. A good many theatrical properties and various luggage had arrived at about the same time, and the wardrobe was supposed to have been forwarded by mistake. The coachman had asked Sir Jasper if he was to go on feeding the horse, and Sir Jasper had replied, "Certainly, until it was fetched."

It had not been fetched, and Jimmy had a curiosity to revisit the scene of his highway robbery. With Butt as an ally it could be done in comparative safety,

for the two of them together—Jimmy argued—could at least outwit the farmer or the carter, even if they could not oppose them by brute strength. Butt was of opinion the latter could be tried with good prospect of success, and was disposed to vote for hand-to-hand contest. They started out, finally, with catapults for skirmishing with, and a stout piece of rope, which could, Jimmy thought, be used primarily as a lasso, and secondarily to bind the hands and legs of any captive that might turn up. It was wound round Butt's body, and made him a conspicuous object.

Jimmy led the way. He had not succeeded in striking the same bargain with his mother as on the previous occasion, Lady Mallendon arguing, with justice, that Augustus's companionship made a walk less of a tedious affair, and therefore of less pecuniary value than a solitary one. Two shillings were extracted, in case they should stop out to tea, but Lady Mallendon almost wished they wouldn't. She felt responsible, she said, for Augustus. What would she say to Augustus's parents if anything ill befell him? She should certainly be anxious until they returned.

Jimmy then led the way to Farmer Dunt's fields, but except that, a little later on, he received an idea that was destined to bear fruit in quite an unexpected fashion, nothing occurred to justify Lady Mallendon's anxiety. Butt did, indeed, the day being a warm one, develop a kind of rash from wearing the rope round his body, but a bathe in the stream where Jimmy had tethered his cart-horse on the previous expedition remedied this. When they came eventually to the base of operations, Farmer Dunt, luckily for himself perhaps, was not there, and Jimmy and Butt, having recovered the gun, the stick cover of which had pre-

served it from rain and dew, had shots at the scarecrow undisturbed.

The idea, to which reference has been made, occurred to Jimmy on the way home, and at that very same inn from which Jimmy had abstracted the cart.

He and Butt had entered, partly from curiosity, partly for tea, and, as it chanced, the bar parlor contained, besides the landlady, two persons who have already played parts in this history. One was the pink-faced man, and the other was Police-Constable Bigstock. They were, though Jimmy did not at once gather it, discussing his own misdeed.

"The curiosest thing I've ever heer'd on," Mrs. Cleavin was saying, as the boys entered. "Quite the curiosest. Why, I do declare, and here be Master Mallendon, come for some of my cider, I dare say."

Jimmy had patronized the inn at the cross-roads before now, and so had Sir Jasper; and Mrs. Cleavin knew The Ashlands.

"How d'you do, Mrs. Cleavin?" said Jimmy cheerfully. "Fine day, Sergeant?"

"It be," said Mr. Bigstock, gratified by the title.

"We will have some cider," Jimmy continued, seating himself on a settle with Butt. "Two pints, please, Mrs. Cleavin, and some cake, if you've got any. What's the most curious thing you ever heard of?"

"Why," said Mrs. Cleavin, to whom the idea of Jimmy and the boy whom Farmer Dunt had described in wrathful language as a "ragging-muffing," being one and the same, never occurred. "Why, rightly speaking, there's two things that's the queerest a body ever could 'a' believed, and one's the vanishing of a man called—what is't the parson's groom's named, Mr. Bigstock?"

"Farrell," said Mr. Bigstock, "is 'is rightful name, but Higginson is what he calls hisself."

"Farrell," repeated Mrs. Cleavin. "He's one of the things. Clean gone like a ghost he has. And the other's a hoss an' cart and wardrobe driv' by this man here"—she indicated the pink-faced man—"clean run away to goodness on'y knows where, though Mr. Bigstock, I dare say, 'll show us."

Jimmy, to whom the name of Farrell conveyed little, was fully aware that the second mystery was one of his own working. He kicked Butt on the shins to admonish him what was up, and asked, innocently,

"How did the cart get run away with?"

"Well, I expect Mr. Bigstock 'll tell 'ee, if ye ask 'im," said Mrs. Cleavin—"while I'm 'a getting of they cakes."

"Do let's hear, Sergeant," said Jimmy, in a coaxing voice.

Mr. Bigstock complied with the request in a dignified way. The second mysterious disappearance had only been divulged to him on his return from the Langston Bucket rectory on Saturday: owing to the fact that the proprietor of the "Sow and Pigs" had up to then hourly expected the return of his horse and cart. As, however, it had not turned up, and the pink-faced man, in spite of being threatened with dismissal, had persisted in his story that it had been driven off by some invisible agency, and that he couldn't find it though he had been everywhere he could think of, the proprietor had been reluctantly compelled to put the matter into the hands of the police. But for the fact that it gave him a good deal of importance, and could also be treated in a more high-minded manner than the first, the second mystery

would have driven Mr. Bigstock distracted. Nothing like either of them had ever before been heard of in Waybury, and Mr. Bigstock felt that if he failed to unravel them, at least there would be no successful precedent to make his failure inglorious. The pink-faced man was as wax in his hands—unlike Miss Faviel—and consented to all manner of cross-examination and theories involving sudden pounces upon the most unlikely places without a murmur. Mr. Bigstock's presence with the pink-faced man at the present moment was due to the fact that it had seemed to him good to visit the scene of the disaster and take his bearings from there. His latest theory was that the cart had been run away with by the horse, and the horse only, and was to be found in some chalk-pit near the inn.

"In which case, of course," Mr. Bigstock said to the pink-faced man, "you'll be liable to pay damages, Sam."

"I ain't," said the pink-faced miserably, "got no damages to pay. Mr. Jopper—he ain't even paid me my week's wages—says he won't, neither, till it's found."

"Well, you ain't married, luckily," said Mr. Bigstock. "So I dare say you'll be able to pay it off at two shillings a week."

The pink-faced man breathed heavily at this prospect, but said nothing, and Jimmy's conscience smote him. He resolved to make amends.

"It's a funny thing," he said, giving Butt another admonishing kick, "but our coachman, up at The Ashlands, you know, was talking only to-day of a horse and cart that he'd got in the stables, and didn't know where they'd come from; did he, Butt?"

"No," said Butt, giving loyal support. "Thought they might have strayed."

"Hoss with one white sock an' two patches on 'is off side?" asked the pink-faced man eagerly.

"I believe so," said Jimmy, and Butt nodded.

"Then that's 'im," said the pink-faced man, beaming.

"Wait a bit!" said Mr. Bigstock. "Don't you jump to conclusions, Sam! It might be, an' it might not be. I allow," said Bigstock, with a happy and accommodating stretch of the imagination, "that I had a theory that the hoss might 'a' strayed that way. There's a wheeltrack goin' that way as I noticed, upon comin' in here. In fac', I made a note on it. There it is." Mr. Bigstock produced his notebook and pointed to a pencil-mark on one of the pages. "I were a-goin' to follow that there track as far as The Ashlands, examinin' chalk-pits on the way. So if it turns out as the hoss an' cart is there, that there theory of mine'll be justified. But don't you jump to conclusions, Sam. It's only a theory of mine, mind, and I don't say nothink for certain as yit."

"Was there a wardrobe too?" asked the pink-faced man, who seemed to be less damped by Mr. Bigstock's caution than he had hitherto been.

"Yes, there was," said Jimmy.

"To think of't," said Mrs. Cleavin, who had in the meanwhile returned. "How it could 'a' got there—all that distance? Flown, I dare say. I would never 'a' believed it—never."

"You ain't been trained, ma'am," explained Mr. Bigstock, "not to foller a clue."

"That's true," said Mrs. Cleavin, "I ain't, but there, the queerest thing about it all still to my mind,

is why you never haven't heerd a word from the genel'man, if genel'man you kin call 'im, as the wardrobe belongs to. Why ain't he applied to you, Mr. Bigstock? To hear 'im you'd 'a' thought, when that there wardrobe vanished, there was a diamond neckless inside of it."

"You would," the pink-faced man agreed.

"You can't argy from that," said Mr. Bigstock.

"There isn't anything inside, anyhow," said Jimmy, who had examined the wardrobe.

"What did I say?" said Mr. Bigstock. "You wouldn't—not if you was trained—you wouldn't expect anything to be inside a wardrobe which had just been bought at a second-'and shop."

"The very same shop, wasn't it," said Mrs. Cleavin, "as the young man vanished from?"

Mr. Bigstock nodded.

"How was that?" asked Jimmy.

Mr. Bigstock told this story also, but in such a rambling manner that for Jimmy—unacquainted with the facts—there was no suggestion of Faviel in it. It was an interesting story, however, and appealed to Jimmy's imagination.

"I suppose," he said suddenly, having just finished the cake Mrs. Cleavin had provided, "that groom-fellow couldn't possibly have been in the wardrobe when it was bought?"

Mr. Bigstock shook his head over such an amateur suggestion.

"I thort of it," he said. "We have to think of everything. But it wouldn't do. He'd be there now, if he'd got in."

"He might have got out," said Jimmy. "It might explain why this other man—at Hanging Coppice,

didn't you say?—was in such a rage at losing it, and didn't like to apply to you, eh? ”

Mrs. Cleavin was rather taken by the suggestion, which made Mr. Bigstock reject it the more crushingly.

“ You can fit anything up to a p'int,” he said. “ But to the perless'nal detective it ain't wuth consideration.”

Jimmy, in spite of, or perhaps because of, Mr. Bigstock's positiveness, thought the contrary, and instantly formed the germ of a plan for going up to Hanging Coppice and examining into its inhabitants. It was only a small germ, however, and he forgot it on the way home, accompanied as he and Butt were by Mr. Bigstock and the pink-faced man, at Mr. Bigstock's request.

Things needed a little managing when they did reach The Ashlands, but by putting Mr. Bigstock in communication with the coachman, and through him with Sir Jasper, and thereafter discreetly disappearing with Butt, Jimmy contrived to effect that the proprietor of the “ Sow and Pigs ” should be put into possession of his lost cart and horse without any further light being thrown upon the cause of their disappearance. He would have liked to tip the pink-faced man, but it was impossible under the circumstances, and he had to abandon the idea.

Later on in the evening Jimmy learned from his father that Mr. Bigstock had requested permission for the wardrobe to remain where it was, until the owner should have been made acquainted with its whereabouts.

CHAPTER XXVII

O'LEVIN INSINUATES

MR. BLENKENSTEIN hardly knew whether to be pleased with the progress of his affairs or not. On the one hand, they had gone satisfactorily enough. His antagonist was a captive in his hands, or, to be exact, in the hands of his agent; and, so far as could be judged, likely to remain so for the four days that still remained to complete the period of the wager.

The thought of that was amazingly gratifying. He had never believed at first that luck would help him to be sure not only of winning the £10,000, but also of keeping Faviel away from the Mallendons for a full month. One or other he had hoped for—not both. Yet both seemed certainties now, and certainties that would be brought off not by luck, but by his own cleverness. He had done some clever things before now, but never one so clever as this. Except for that first slip of trying to have Faviel arrested at the start, he had made no mistake. Fortune had been against him more often than not, but he had got the better of fortune. It was all his own thought to capture Faviel, and not give him the letter that would prove him the loser until the month was out.

There was nothing in the rules the Committee had drawn up to make that dishonest. Some of them might not think it sporting, but they could not object to it. So long as he—Blenkenstein—saw to it that

Faviel received the letter in good time, nothing else mattered; and he had made sure that Faviel should receive it in good time by having him locked up and guarded in a place where—at any moment—the letter could be delivered to him. By that same means he had also made sure that there would be no more interviews between Faviel and Miss Mallendon.

The actual mill had been Boke's selection, but the idea had been his—his own. It was a stroke of genius to have him tied up there as good as spoiled of £10,000—and yet stopped from worrying anybody but Boke and Coppenwell. Just at first, Blenkenstein had been tempted to give him the letter (thereby winning the £10,000 straight off) and still keep him in the mill. A fool would have done so—even an ordinary sensible man might have succumbed to the thought of clearing all that money beyond any shadow of doubt. But if he had done so, he would either have had to let Faviel go or have had to risk an action later. So long as the wager was on, and the money technically unwon, nothing he did would be actionable. He was entitled to hold up Faviel till the letter was delivered to him. He could easily profess later—supposing the facts came to Miss Mallendon's ears, and no doubt some of Faviel's friends would try to make the most of them—that, in keeping back the letter to the last moment, he was really acting in Faviel's interests—giving the poor chap a chance. He didn't want to win all his worldly possessions—not he. He had rather hoped Faviel would escape—was certain he could have done so in Faviel's place.

Blenkenstein could almost hear himself explaining this to Miss Mallendon later, putting Faviel in such

a ridiculous light that even his friends would not be able to defend him. Yes—it had been a fine idea.

In another direction, too, things looked rosy enough. Miss Mallendon was distinctly more approachable than she had been a week before. The reserve, that had amounted almost to coolness, was changed for a subdued friendliness much more to Blenkenstein's mind. He did not want a demonstrative bride; demonstrative people were apt to become a nuisance. He could do all the demonstration that was needed, and there wasn't very much needed. All he desired was a wife he could be proud of—who was proud, but who wouldn't be proud towards him. Therefore the suggestion of almost humility that was visible in Miss Mallendon at present pleased him. He did not object to see her subdued, for while he understood it was due in part to the injury done to her pride by Faviel's failure to meet her on that Sunday evening, he felt that ultimately it was he, Blenkenstein, who had subdued her by causing the tryst to fail. All this, therefore, was very satisfactory to him.

On the other hand, she had not been rendered so completely defenseless that he could with perfect certainty end the siege, so to speak, by storm. Once or twice, when he had gone near to proposing for the second time, a flash of the old spirit had reappeared, and she had intimated that she would like the period of the armistice to be observed as literally as possible. That meant he was not to ask her finally until Saturday. The fortnight she had asked for came to an end then. The month fixed for the wager came to an end on the same day at midnight. It was running things rather fine, but he would not have to wait to make his proposal until midnight. Some time in the

course of the day—when the confounded charity entertainment was over, perhaps—he would do it, and Faviel could be released just in time to know that he was too late. There was something particularly pleasant to think over in that.

Still, it did rather annoy Blenkenstein that he must postpone his triumph to the last minute. Another thing that annoyed him was O'Levin's behavior. O'Levin had come up to him on Tuesday evening after dinner and insisted on settling his debts. O'Levin had been rather vicious for some days towards Blenkenstein, considering that he owed him money, and Blenkenstein had explained, with his own particular delicacy, that debts and liberties didn't match. He had not supposed O'Levin had the money to pay him with, but somehow the man had raised it. Blenkenstein had thereupon tried to laugh off the payment.

"I don't want it, confound it!" he said. "Any time'll do, you know."

"I don't want it either," said O'Levin. "'Tis one o' the paradoxes of me bright career that I never do want money excepting when I haven't got any. So take it, Blink, me boy, and be grateful. 'Tisn't a fortune, but ye may need it to pay off your own debts at the end of the week."

"What do you mean?" said Blenkenstein.

"The ten thousand, sure, that ye put on the wager."

"I'm hoping Faviel's going to pay me that."

"Are ye, now?" said O'Levin. "I expect Faviel's hoping that same. Ye don't seem to have got him yet, and d'ye know I met Maxhaven the other day? Ye remimber him, don't ye? A long American—he dined with us that night."

"Yes; what about him?"

"Why, by chance," said O'Levin, "he went down into the country—so he tells me—by the same train as Faviel; a train starting at 12:2."

"That's when Faviel started, is it?" said Blenkenstein, with affected interest.

"Didn't ye know it?" said O'Levin. "Maxhaven told me that he got out at a bit of a wayside station, and was set on by a troop of fellows that were looking, it seemed, for Faviel. Thought they'd got him, in fact. They'd also started by the 12:2."

Blenkenstein inwardly anathematized Mr. Boke for not informing him who it was that he had attacked. Outwardly, however, he affected to be highly amused.

"I didn't hear of that," he said. "My men, of course they were my men,"—(Blenkenstein thought it safest, under the circumstances, not to deny this)—"lost sight of Faviel altogether that night. Never told me they went for the American, though."

"Pretty sharp work, starting by the 12:2, wasn't it?" said O'Levin.

"Oh, I don't know," said Blenkenstein coolly. "I took every precaution, of course. Had men on the lookout at all the principal stations from twelve punctually. Smart work, if you like."

"Very," said O'Levin. The time of the train's starting was, as he knew, Faviel's weak point, should he think of claiming a foul. It was practically impossible that Blenkenstein should not have anticipated the time; but it would be hard to prove that he had.

"So ye didn't get on to the track, anyway?" he said sarcastically, hoping to learn if Blenkenstein had been more successful recently.

"No," said Blenkenstein.

"But ye've done so since?" O'Levin now forced his question direct.

"Well," said Blenkenstein, "you'll see in the course of time. I don't know that it would be quite safe to enter into all details with a man who's obviously not on my side in what I imagined was a straightforward, unprejudiced wager."

With which cut at O'Levin, Blenkenstein took his departure. He had to go up to town on some rather important business connected with the Imperial Cities Exchange, Limited, and was not sorry for the obligation. Absence might lend an enchantment to the view of him—in Judith's eyes—which his presence did not seem to do. Moreover, he would escape those imbecile rehearsals, and O'Levin's impertinent fooleries at them.

"Yes, I'm afraid I shall have to stop the night, if not two," he said to Lady Mallendon, who was hospitably anxious to know about when he was to be expected back. "I doubt if I shall be able to get back to-morrow, because I have to see a man rather late in the evening. It's a nuisance, because I should be free to come down after lunch, otherwise; and one doesn't want to kick one's heels in London from twelve to eight."

"No, of course not," said Lady Mallendon sympathetically. "I do wish you could put it off. But, if you can't, and really have nothing to do—but I don't know that I ought to trouble you——"

"If there's anything I can do," said Blenkenstein, "I shall be happy, you know."

"Well," said Lady Mallendon, upon whom the cares of the forthcoming entertainment were beginning to tell, "it is very kind of you, and, if you really don't

mind, it would be of the greatest assistance. It's rather a delicate matter. At least, I do not know that it's delicate, but it might be, because the man is a Chinaman, and you never know—at least, I don't think I should ever know—if I was understanding what he said to me, or if he was understanding what I said to him. That is the worst of pidgin English, which seems to me a great mistake, though I dare say it helps people in China to understand, more or less, what is meant, and is better than simple gesticulations. Only I don't even know if he talks pidgin English, and that is really what I want to find out before he comes, and also what he would like to eat, while he is here, as the servants might not be able to serve it up at a moment's notice, and then, if he got sulky or ill, and couldn't do his tricks—or wouldn't—at the last moment, when his name is down on the programme; rather a catch, Jimmy says, as he's sure to be good at whatever tricks he does, and I'm sure I hope none of them are vulgar. As I was saying, if he refused to do them, it would be so very awkward. I thought of not asking him, but Jimmy insisted, and said that I had promised, so I had to."

"Who is it?" asked Blenkenstein, hoping he had not let himself in for anything very troublesome.

"A Chinese conjurer. A—a friend," said Lady Mallendon, "asked me to employ him, as he is so very clever. Chy Bang or Kung or Ling. I really forget which his name is. It's quite a simple one for a Chinaman, and I suppose it would be sufficient to address him as Mr. Bang, or whatever it is. He must understand some English, don't you think, if he has been performing at a music hall? He may, of course, be Prince Bang, for all one knows, but, really, if a man

does tricks at a music hall, he cannot mind if one does not realize these distinctions."

"You want me to find out if he understands English?"

"If you could," said Lady Mallendon. "I wrote to him about Saturday, and he replied in quite a nice letter, mentioning his terms and his tricks and all that quite clearly; but then he may have got some one to write for him. I can't help thinking that he did, because I wrote to him again, saying he had better come down by the 9:30 on Saturday, so that he could have lunch before the fête begins, and his letter, which has just arrived, is so full of blots that I cannot make head or tail of it. It may be that he shut it up when it was wet; or, perhaps, on the other hand, they are not blots but Chinese characters, which he assumes that I understand, though why he should I can't think. If Sir Jasper were in, I could consult him about it, but he's gone out for the whole day, I expect. He does so dislike all these preparations, and I hardly know whether he or our gardener is more easily upset by them."

"Well, I don't altogether blame them," said Blenkenstein bluffly. "Charity doesn't pay, you know, when one's got to run the whole affair. Not business, eh? But if that's all you want, I can easily enough find out. I'll send one of my clerks round to the fellow, if you'll give me his address."

"Here it is," said Lady Mallendon, handing him a slip of paper with the address on, "and thank you so much. If your clerk could ask him what he fancies? I thought fricassee of chicken would do, if the chicken is not a sacred bird in China, and, of course, there will be heaps of things to choose from besides. Only

Jimmy said that they would only eat something strangled, and in that case he must bring it with him, for I cannot expect any of the servants to strangle anything, even if I could permit it."

Blenkenstein, who took Jimmy's humor as seriously as did Lady Mallendon, and by no means so respectfully, said it was merely another case of Jimmy's ignorance, and soothed Lady Mallendon's feelings as hostess at the expense of her maternal ones. He gave it as his opinion that a Chinaman would eat anything, and that Lady Mallendon needn't worry about him in the least.

"Well, I won't, then," she said. "Only, as we're going to charge a shilling entrance to his tent, I should like him to be at his best. And would you please tell him that if he's going to bring rabbits out of hats, there are plenty of hats here—Sir Jasper has at least twenty of his own—but he'd better use his own rabbits; and I should prefer him not to bring any serpents, as they are always dangerous when they escape, and we do not want any accidents."

CHAPTER XXVIII

COLONEL GLEMMY SUSPECTS MR. COPPENWELL

THE name of Colonel Glemmy has not hitherto been mentioned in this narrative, for the reason that hitherto Colonel Glemmy has not been of any importance. But since Colonel Glemmy was, unwittingly, to be of assistance to Mr. Faviel a couple of nights later, and enters the story naturally at this point, a few words may not be spent on him in vain.

Important in his own sphere Colonel Glemmy undoubtedly was. No meager part of the county belonged to him: upon his nod the fate of many humble people depended.

A man so great may do as he pleases, and it pleased Colonel Glemmy to look after his property in as personal a manner as was consistent with its size, and to dress as an under-gardener while so employed. He was a small man with a dignified nose, and aristocratic-looking, it might be said, from his finger-tips to the cuffs of his jacket. There the under-gardener began. Strangers to the estate often mistook his rank, which may account for why so shrewd a young man as Mr. Coppenwell mistook it upon the day on which Mr. Blenkenstein went up to town and Sir Jasper fled from the preparations going on in his house for the fête on Saturday. But this is to anticipate.

Colonel Glemmy's mansion was situated not far from The Ashlands, and his estate comprised that dis-

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trict of wood and upland heath which is bounded on the north by Storton Hill, and on the south by Hanging Coppice.

From his mansion to that southern part of his estate Colonel Glemmy set forth on foot after breakfast on Wednesday morning. He had returned from one of our Welsh spas—one of those places where rheumatism can be cured without the necessity of learning a foreign language—on the Monday previous. On the Tuesday he had been through matters concerning the estate with his agent, and had learnt, not without some passing indignation, that the agent had let the mill at Hanging Coppice for three months to a retired sea-captain.

“Eh, mill, mill, mill?” Colonel Glemmy had said. “Let it? Let the mill? Let the mill to a retired sea-captain? What?”

The agent explained that a fair offer had been made for that very useless structure, and that there was some prospect, if the sea-captain cared for it, and the colonel cared to grant his permission, of an offer being made for the tenancy of the mill for some considerable period. “Of course, it’s out of repair and absolutely isolated. Nobody, I imagine, but an old sailor would dream of inhabiting it,” said the agent. “But he gave very respectable references—wanted it in a hurry—took his fancy you know—thought the view from it rather like the sea—so I risked letting him have it for three months without bothering you about it.”

“Well, well,” said Colonel Glemmy. “Well.”

The agent had presumed upon his employer’s well-known love of striking a bargain, however small, in letting the mill; and probably had Mr. Boke been a retired sea-captain, without companions, all would

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have been well. Unfortunately, Colonel Glemmy's head keeper, whom he interviewed after his agent, had a complaint to make.

"What, what?" said Colonel Glemmy. "Heard shots at Hanging Coppice. Shots?"

"Yess'r. Two or three times."

"What's the meaning of it?" demanded Colonel Glemmy.

"Why, sir," said the keeper, "I don't go and say it for certain, 'cos, though we've watched, we ain't been able to detect them; but it's my opinion, sir, that those sailors as have got the old mill there keep a gun between them."

"Gun!" said Colonel Glemmy. "Sailors! How many sailors?"

"Three o' them, sir."

"And a gun? What? One gun? What?"

"Not more'n one, I should say, sir."

"One gun and three sailors—ha!" said Colonel Glemmy, frowning. "Three sailors—ha!"

Having thus fixed the estimated number of the sailors and the guns securely in his brain, Colonel Glemmy dismissed his keeper, and decided to look the matter up in person on the following day. With Colonel Glemmy, as with a good many people whose iron wills would be invaluable to the community if only these wills could be exercised in their proper sphere, to decide upon a thing was to do it; and at noon, accordingly, Colonel Glemmy found himself at the end of the road which, developing at this point into something more resembling a dry river-bed than a highway, leads up through the dense woods known as Hanging Coppice to the mill and the moorlands beyond. The agent had described the mill as abso-

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lutely isolated, and he had by no means exaggerated. The nearest village is a mile and a half away; and the nearest cultivated ground not much nearer. Wooded bits, large and small, spaced with shaggy pasture rising steeply, block this off on the one hand; and on the other, heath begins almost immediately, and extends in plateau shape for a couple of miles before the downward slope towards valley land assumes any appreciable gradient. The heath is a real sandy heath, waist-deep in gorse, and in the summer-time fiery hot across its length and breadth.

How a mill ever came to be planted amid such desolation is the question that occurs to any stranger passing that way, but it is not a question that requires to be answered here. It is sufficient to say that it is a high and solid structure standing on a patch of greensward that seems to have been leveled out of the sloping forest, and that from the top of it one can see thirty miles every way. It may be as well to add at this point, since it points to the picturesqueness of the building, that the great sails were still affixed to it, though they had been furled, so to speak, for many years; and (since Mr. Coppenwell, who is about to come on to the scene in a few minutes, was making for it at this time) the water supply is derived from a pump at the far end of the green patch on which the mill stands. From this well bygone millers had no doubt drawn sparkling water many a time without asking why the well should be situated at the farthest possible distance from the mill itself. Perhaps a water-finder had determined upon the spot.

Colonel Glemmy, pausing to wipe his heated brow at the foot of the fir-girt path that leads up to the mill, was surprised to hear himself greeted by some

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one who had paused at almost the same spot, and was wiping a similarly heated brow under the shade of one of the firs.

"Hullo, Glemmy!"

"What, Mallendon?" said the colonel. "Mallendon, eh? What are you doing here? Camera. What?"

Sir Jasper Mallendon, for he it was who had risen from under the fir, certainly bore about him evidences of the photographer's craft. The legs of his standing implement were strapped across his back; a large box containing the body of the camera was in one hand, a camp-stool was in the other.

"Yes, I've just come up to photograph your wind-mill," he confessed. "The society I belong to is trying to get county landmarks, and it struck me that the mill was one of the most picturesque. And I don't suppose, either, that the sails 'll last for ever. A high wind 'll bring 'em down one of these days."

"And you're going to be the early bird—get the worm—get the worm? Photograph the mill. What?"

"That's it," said Sir Jasper.

"I'm just going up to inspect it myself," said Colonel Glemmy. "I hear my agent's let it. We'll go up together. What?"

"By all means," said Sir Jasper. "How's your rheumatism, Glemmy?" he inquired politely, as the colonel began to toddle up the hill beside him.

"Oh, it's better, thankee. These baths damned expensive, but they make you better," said the colonel.

"Going to be well enough to come over to our exhibition on Saturday? For a charity, you know," said Sir Jasper.

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"Oh, I don't know about that," said the colonel hastily. "Entrance fee? What?"

"A shilling. Goes to the charity, you know."

"Well, well," said Colonel Glemmy, "I don't know if I shall be well enough to manage it. Shilling, you say, for a charity. Charity, what? Greatest of these is charity. What? Well, well. We must see what we can do. Spent a lot of money on that cure. Lot of money—lot of money."

Thus amiably conversing the two old gentlemen ascended the hill, until they reached the place at which two paths branch off to the right.

"I'm going to try and get it," said Sir Jasper, "from the heath side. The trees here will make a good background."

"Well, that's your way, then," said Colonel Glemmy, indicating the upper path. "If you happen to see any one about who looks like a poacher, you might let me know. I'm going to work round from this side. Dare say I'll find you at the top. What?"

"I expect I shall be there half an hour at least," said Sir Jasper.

All unconscious of his fate, Colonel Glemmy pursued the lower path, which, winding still among firs for fifty yards or so, brought him out on the green patch of field on which the mill stands, and close to the well from which Mr. Coppenwell had just been drawing water.

Mr. Coppenwell was not drawing water at the moment, but stooping amid the long grass, examining something which he had placed or found there.

"Ha!" said Colonel Glemmy to himself, "rabbit-wires—rabbit-wires—rabbit-wires," and advanced cautiously, intending to surprise Mr. Coppenwell at his

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work. Almost as he framed his suspicions to himself, however, Colonel Glemmy's foot caught in something and Colonel Glemmy came to the ground with a jerk.

"Damn—damn—damn!" said Colonel Glemmy, in a choke of anger, and Mr. Coppenwell became aware of his presence.

Now, though Mr. Coppenwell had been drawing water, he had not been drinking it. Conscious that they had, so to speak, won their laurels, and needed only to sit tight for a few days more with their prisoner, both he and Mr. Boke, and the third man of the crew, Bilks, had allowed themselves a certain amount of license in the matter of grog. Mr. Boke could take his drink without doing anything but increasing his brain-power, and perhaps adding a little to his imagination, in the way, for example, of persuading himself that he really was a retired sea-captain enjoying his rest and the outlook that he had informed the agent was like the sea. He actually did enjoy it for the time being. Bilks, who had been employed to lift things for a furniture dealer before he entered Mr. Boke's occasional service, had no imagination, but, on the other hand, no amount of liquor left any impression on him beyond that of supreme content. Mr. Coppenwell was the least grog-proof of the three and also the least contented. He had begun to weary already of the country life he had been leading. A cockney by birth, he had begun life as a newsboy, and had drifted into the hairdressing profession. A too great familiarity and an increasing habit of puffing in the faces of his employer's clients, had closed to him any chances of advancement he might otherwise have had in this line of life; and after knocking about for some time he was not sorry to

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undertake work for Mr. Boke, to whom the young man's easy address and boundless impudence were useful assets when he was engaged in making investigations among the poorer classes. Mr. Coppenwell's sole experience of country life hitherto had been an occasional week-end's poaching, and it was he who, in spite of Mr. Boke's remonstrances, had done a little shooting at odd times and at odd hours, in the neighboring woods. His, too, were the rabbit-wires, in one of which Colonel Glemmy had just caught his foot.

Having been drinking, Mr. Coppenwell was at first inclined to regard the colonel's struggles, which were certainly calculated to break the wires, with some indignation. His natural humor, however, overcame this baser instinct, and Mr. Coppenwell stood and roared with laughter for a full minute. The humor was in its turn succeeded by a humane sentiment, which led Mr. Coppenwell, after the colonel had cried, "Hi! help!" several times and had become almost speechless with indignation, to stroll towards his victim.

"'Old up, cocky," said Mr. Coppenwell, as he drew closer.

The colonel, who had risen painfully upon one knee, sank into a sitting posture. He hardly liked to believe his ears.

"What did you say?" he demanded, with a dignity not easily distinguishable from anguish.

"'Old up, cocky," repeated Mr. Coppenwell amiably. "That's wot I said. 'Old up, cocky, and don't you go to pretend as you're a rabbit, 'cos I know better."

"You—you—you impertinent scoundrel!" said

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Colonel Glemmy. "Ah—h—h!" The expression of pain was drawn from him as, by a supreme effort, he got to his feet. "Who are you, you poaching rogue? Where do you come from—what?" He gazed upon Mr. Coppenwell with an awful and menacing expression that would have quelled a more sober man. But Mr. Coppenwell was not in a condition to be impressed.

"What—pot—got—'ot—rot—Scott!" said Mr. Coppenwell, with a rapid rhyming facility that drove Colonel Glemmy almost crazy with wrath. He had never been mimicked in his life, and his pluck was indubitable. With a roar of anger, and a plunge that brought away the wire from the ground, he fell upon Mr. Coppenwell, and Mr. Coppenwell fell to the ground.

Hurrying out, in his anxiety to learn what the sound of voices might betoken, Mr. Boke found the two locked in deadly strife upon the ground.

"Drop it, Coppenwell," said Mr. Boke angrily and cloudily. "Now, sir," as he pulled the colonel to his feet, "what's all this about? I can't have people fighting with my men in me own grounds, so to speak."

"Are you the man this mill's been let to?" demanded Colonel Glemmy.

"Cap'n Bunbury, at your service," said Mr. Boke; proceeding sentimentally, "Cap'n Bunbury, as has flown his flag on many a stormy sea, and dropped anchor at last in this here peaceful haven."

"And this is one of your men, is it?" The colonel crooked a finger at Mr. Coppenwell.

Mr. Boke nodded.

"Man an' boy, he've sailed with me," he allowed.

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"First in the cabin, and arterwards as coxun o' my gig."

"Very well," said Colonel Glemmy. "Like master, like man, ha! The most rascally poaching fellow I've ever seen, your man. I give you notice, both of you. D'ye hear? Ha—what? Do you know who I am? Colonel Glemmy, sir, Colonel Glemmy, as you'll learn to your cost. Oh, I know," added the colonel, as Mr. Boke mildly expostulated at the severity of this language, and explained the nature of his lease. "I know that fool of an agent of mine gave you the place for three months, and you're within your rights if you stop here. But there's been shooting heard. My men have heard guns—what?—guns. You've been poaching, the lot of you, poaching—poaching. And I tell you what, my man, captain or no captain, I'm going to have a watch set, watch set—set; and if one o' you is seen about with a gun, till you go, till the day you go—what?—off you'll pack to jail—jail—jail—mark my words—jail—jail."

And without further parley, which his scarcity of breath would, in any case, have rendered one-sided, Colonel Glemmy limped off the field, snorting indignation.

"What do you want to go and be such a soft fool for as to quarrel with 'im?" said Mr. Boke to his assistant, as he watched the colonel fading in the distance.

"'E went for me fust," said Mr. Coppenwell sulkily, "like a bloomin' little tiger."

"Well, you needn't ha' hit 'im back," said Mr. Boke. "He's the boss round here. We shan't have any peace now. Mind you don't go out with your gun, Cop, or we shall be done yet."

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"I'd like to gun him," said Mr. Coppenwell. "Where's that dam water Hi was fetching? Let's go and 'ave a drink."

"Well, I hope we shan't have any one else up afore Sunday," said Boke, as they re-entered the mill. "A colonel to-day, a copper yesterday—it's too thick." He alluded to the fact that Police-Constable Bigstock, in pursuance of his plan to acquaint Mr. Boke with the fact that his wardrobe had been discovered, had come up to the mill on the previous day, though without gaining any particular information or receiving many thanks. "We don't want no more. Is he all right, Bilks?" he added to the thick-set man who had been guarding the mill in his absence.

"'E's all right," said Bilks. "I only just left him."

"Port'ole open?"

"I dunno."

"You should ha' seen to it," said Mr. Boke severely.

"He ain't likely to go and throw hisself down fifty feet," said Bilks contentedly.

"No, but he might 'ave shouted," said Mr. Boke. "Not that he can afford to give hisself away to just any one any more than we can afford to give him away."

Mr. Faviel, a prisoner in the top floor of the mill, had not shouted through the loophole facing heathward, which was the sole opening in the hot attic room where he had spent his time, since Mr. Boke had brought off his coup on Sunday in the very glade which Faviel had appointed for his tryst with Judith.

Nor had Faviel thrown himself out, though he had measured the distance to the ground once or twice with

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that object in view. It was too formidable a drop to be tried, except in the very last resort.

But he had stood at the loophole for some considerable time with his head out, glad to drink in all the air he could. And this proceeding, little as he or any one might have expected it, brought about a change of circumstances which must await their relation till the following chapter.

CHAPTER XXIX

SIR JASPER'S PHOTOGRAPH

"How beautiful!" said Miss Finch.

"It is indeed a triumph of the photographic art," said Mr. Wormyer, who was standing at the back of her chair in his shepherd's costume.

"Grand effect, grand effect," said Mr. Bayford, to whom the object of admiration had just been passed.

"Well, it's only a negative, of course," said Sir Jasper modestly. "But I think it ought to turn out pretty good."

"Turneresque," said Mr. Bayford, "Turneresque."

"What are they all patting you on the back for, Sir J.?" asked Jimmy, lounging up with his friend Butt.

"A picture of the mill at Hanging Coppice," said Sir Jasper. "I took it when I was up there with Colonel Glemmy the other day. He's let the mill to a couple of men whom he now suspects to be poachers. Hope they won't damage it while they're there. It's picturesquely situated, and a big solid mill over a hundred years old, I dare say. The view from the top must be very fine."

"Why, that's the mill Butt and I were going over to inspect," said Jimmy, who had secured the negative and was examining it. "The man there, you know, is the chap who bought that wardrobe which strayed here with the horse and cart. Poacher, is he?"

"So Colonel Glemmy maintains."

"Hullo," said Jimmy, "did you see that face at the window when you were taking it?" He handed the negative to his father, pointing to where something certainly resembling a head appeared at the little top window of the mill.

"Curious," said Sir Jasper, examining his handiwork again. "No, I certainly didn't notice any one there while I was taking it. And from what Glemmy gave me to understand both the men were out in the field talking to him. In fact he went for one of them. There must be a third."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Jimmy solemnly, "if that's the chap that old constable was talking about, who vanished in Waybury the same time as the wardrobe. I vote we go up and inspect the mill to-night."

"My dear Jimmy," said Lady Mallendon, who was one of the group on the lawn. "It's quite impossible. It'll be quite dark. And if the men are poachers, I don't know why you should want to interfere with them——"

"There's going to be a moon to-night," said Jimmy. "The view'll be jolly fine by moonlight. Sir J. said it would."

"I didn't say by moonlight," objected Sir Jasper.

"And, in any case, everybody ought to go to bed early to-night, so as to be refreshed for the acting to-morrow. Don't you think they ought, Mr. O'Levin?" Lady Mallendon appealed to the stage manager, who had just come up, his labors all but over. The last rehearsal had just come to an end, and O'Levin had expressed himself satisfied with the efforts of the company. There had been an all-round improvement, and, as O'Levin had confided to Miss

Etta Warley, if only the hero could be left out at the actual performance—as he had been that day and the day previous (Blenkenstein was still up in town),—and the play altered entirely, the audience would have nothing to complain of.

When, therefore, Lady Mallendon appealed to O'Levin to exercise his authority and bar the moonlight visit to the mill, she found herself very lukewarmly supported.

"If they enjoy themselves," said O'Levin, "it'll brisk them up. They'll be all the livelier to-morrow. What does the troupe itself say to Jimmy's proposition?"

To Miss Finch and Mr. Wormyer the idea of an expedition by moonlight was all that was delightful. Other members of the company also approved. Etta, who was to stop the night at The Ashlands, was entranced by it, when she was sought out and appealed to. Judith would in any case have assented to the appeals of Jimmy and Butt. Lady Mallendon found herself, in fact, in a sad minority.

"We could drive over after dinner," said Sir Jasper, "and have an extra wagonette from the inn. Of course I can't promise a view from the top, because the people are in it, you see."

"That doesn't matter," said Etta. "The drive itself will be so lovely."

"And the woods dreaming in the moon," murmured Miss Finch.

"Upon my word," said Mr. Bayford boldly, "I am very strongly tempted to join the gay throng, if I may. Very strongly tempted."

"Do," said Sir Jasper hospitably.

"Wormyer and I shall add that seasoning of cau-

tion to the dish of hilarity, which will cause it to assume favor in Lady Mallendon's eyes, eh, Wormyer?" said Mr. Bayford gaily. "No, thank you, Sir Jasper, I will not stay to dinner—very many thanks. Wormyer and I will come up and join you when you are ready to start. Come, Wormyer, there is a mothers' meeting at 6:5, if I remember right. Duty, duty, Wormyer."

The curate was borne off, not over grateful to his rector, after the hour of 8:30 had been fixed on for the start.

"It'll be a good hour's drive," said Sir Jasper. "And we shall all have to walk up the hill through the woods. So we mustn't start later than that."

"What about Mr. Blenkenstein?" said Lady Mallendon.

"He'll get down by the seven train at Waybury, so he ought to be here in time. If he isn't," said Sir Jasper, who easily put up with the deprivation of Blenkenstein's company, "you'll have to talk Westralians with him till we come back."

As it happened, Blenkenstein did get in a little late for dinner, but in time enough for the expedition, if he cared for it. That he did not care for it in the least was natural enough. It alarmed him horribly. He tried to assure himself that he need not be alarmed, but for the first few minutes his alarm only grew. He realized that if by some accident Faviel's presence were discovered, all his splendid planning would go for nothing. Its splendor depended wholly on its success. He had not even given Faviel the letter as yet—had not made sure of the £10,000. He was still willing to lose that if the other achievement were granted him. But the winning of Judith

depended, he felt, upon his appearing in the rôle of the successful man, Faviel being shown to be the fool. If Faviel somehow got away, he would not appear a fool. On the contrary he would be able to show up Blenkenstein in a ridiculous—not to say ungenerous—light. And that before Judith had given him—Blenkenstein—her answer. Faviel must not get away—even if he had to be knocked on the head to prevent it. Blenkenstein's thoughts took that ugly path with reluctance. He had no wish to knock any one on the head. That sort of sin more than any other had a sure way of finding you out—with very unpleasant results. Of course he need not have anything to do with it personally. There were always other people who would not mind taking the risks for a consideration, and nobody need ever know who offered the consideration. Blenkenstein always had managed to keep secret the things that publication would give an unpleasant color to, and he did not see now why if Faviel disappeared for good, anybody need be able to charge it to his rival. After all, the fellow had undertaken to disappear. Plenty of people have disappeared for good and—meaning to—Suppose the thing had to be done, who would undertake it? Blenkenstein did not feel quite sure about Boke. Boke was the sort of rogue who has scruples, and is rather proud of them. A useful man in many cases, because he can be trusted by his employer: useless in others, because he is unemployable. No, Boke would not do. But that young Coppenwell?

Blenkenstein switched his thoughts back to the immediate thought of the excursion with some trouble. It was a less anxious matter than the one it had led

on to; but it was an anxious matter too; and it was only with difficulty that he refrained from showing his anxiety about it. If there had been the smallest chance of giving Mr. Boke warning, he would have done so, and kept away, leaving the rest to his agent to manage. But there was no chance whatever, and Blenkenstein, after pooh-poohing the notion until Sir Jasper almost became testy, had to decide whether he would accompany the others or remain behind.

It seemed best, on the whole, to go with them. He might get an opportunity of conveying to Boke some idea of what was up at least a minute or two beforehand: and even if he could not, Boke, he imagined, would not be such a fool as to admit the party into the mill. There would be no danger of suspicion attaching to himself in any case; and no one, so far as he had been able to make out, had guessed for a moment who the face at the mill-window in Sir Jasper's picture belonged to. Why, indeed, should any one?

Moreover, it would not look well if he stood out of the party, when Judith was going. Moonlight nights were things lovers were supposed to look forward to. It was just possible that she was looking forward to it, and would give him an opening. Yes, decidedly he would go. But he would take with him the letter which in the last resort had to be handed to Faviel. It might become necessary to deliver it, and it was certainly well to be prepared.

At 8:30 accordingly he joined the party of twenty-three, all told, which, in various degrees of high spirits, stormed the landau, the two wagonettes and the governess cart, which were ranged in the front drive, ready for the journey. It had been agreed, on

O'Levin's suggestion, that it would be more sporting not to arrange carriage loads, but to have a general scramble, after the manner of a cotillon, for who should drive together, a happy suggestion, which had, however, the result of leaving Mr. Bayford—who had playfully entered into the spirit of the thing, and made a rollicking sprint for the governess cart—alone in that vehicle.

"Plenty of room here, Miss Warley: plenty of room, Miss Finch. Wormyer, I have reserved a place for you—reserved a place," said Mr. Bayford, rather pleased at first with the sagacity that had enabled him to have seats at his disposal. "Ah, sheep, sheep," he continued, somewhat pettishly, as Etta failed to hear him and Mr. Wormyer clung defiantly, and with great tenacity, to the step of the wagonette, in which Miss Finch had gained a corner seat—"all rushing for the same spot—the same spot!"

The situation was saved by Sir Jasper good-naturedly joining him in the governess cart with Judith, whereupon Blenkenstein followed.

"Ha!" said Mr. Bayford, well pleased, "forward we go—the brightest and the best——"

"Wait!" cried Lady Mallendon, hurrying down the steps, "where is Augustus?"

Butt, perched on the outside of the box-seat, between Jimmy and the driver of the wagonette from the inn, had the indignity of having a Shetland shawl pressed upon him, with instructions to keep it round his mouth on the way back.

He thanked Lady Mallendon in a muffled voice which suggested that the shawl was already affixed, and the cavalcade started.

It is not necessary to describe the drive, which was,

like many others through English moonlit lanes, full of night-scented flowers and the noise of night-jars and rabbits scudding for their burrows in the darkling hedgerows. No contretemps occurred except in the case of Butt, who—upon Jimmy persuading the inn-keeper to intrust him with the reins, and the horses breaking as a consequence into an unexpected gallop—fell off the outside edge of the box-seat into a ditch, amid the cries of ladies, but was picked up uninjured. Jimmy was therefore deposed from the reins in spite of his argument that it was not his fault the horses started off, but O'Levin's, who, in trying to imitate a night-jar on his flute, had startled them.

"Out upon ye, Jimmy!" said O'Levin. "'Twas Philomela I was calling to, and if ye listen carefully, ye can hear the sweet bird responding——"

"Owls!" said Jimmy.

Miss Finch besought O'Levin to insist upon Butt's being brought into the body of the wagonette, but O'Levin thought he would be safer and certainly more conveniently placed—so far as other people were concerned—between Jimmy and the driver.

"He will dry quicker there—like the ham in the sandwich——"

"Well, you'll hold on, Jimmy, won't you?" pleaded Miss Finch.

"I won't fall off," said Jimmy agreeably.

"You would if I drove," grunted Butt.

"Everybody would," said Jimmy.

Butt clambered up into the middle place, after having shaken himself at the suggestion of the driver, and in due time the four vehicles arrived at that break in the road among the fir-trees where Sir Jasper had encountered Colonel Glemmy two days before.

CHAPTER XXX

MOONLIGHT AT THE MILL

"WE'VE got to walk from here," announced Sir Jasper.

The governess cart had arrived slightly ahead of the others, and, rather to Sir Jasper's surprise and gratification, Blenkenstein—who was not in the habit of putting himself out for other people—had offered to go ahead up the hill and try and obtain permission from the mill's tenant for the party to go up to the top of the mill and see the view from there.

"I don't suppose," said Blenkenstein, who knew that the permission was going to be asked anyhow, and saw an opportunity for himself in constituting himself the mouthpiece of the party—"I don't suppose, you know, that he'll let us go up, as the place is inhabited. Probably gone to bed by now. But I'll go ahead and see. I can get up quicker than some of the ladies, and be able to tell you whether or no, when you all get to the top."

"I don't see why you should go up by yourself," said Sir Jasper, supposing that Judith's company through the wooded walk would not be unpleasant to Blenkenstein.

"I'll go, too," said Judith, also gratified by what she conceived to be Blenkenstein's unselfishness.

"And I," said Mr. Bayford, "will accompany you. *A tertium quid—ha—a tertium quid—*"

"You'll never keep up, Bayford. Better wait," said Sir Jasper tactfully.

"Oh, I am a grand walker, grand walker," said Mr. Bayford. "Forward——"

And forward, obviously to Blenkenstein's annoyance and secretly to Judith's relief, Mr. Bayford went, in their company, chatting to his own refrains as they went. The air was so still in those thick woods that Mr. Bayford's voice filled it like an organ; and nothing else was audible at all until they came to the branching paths, of which Mr. Bayford, who had visited the mill two or three times before in bygone years, selected the lower. As they entered this, the noise of a shot at no great distance among the trees broke up one of Mr. Bayford's reminiscences.

"Who can that be?" said Judith.

"Why, I am afraid," said Mr. Bayford—"I am very much afraid that that must be a poacher. How sad when a man takes to poaching! The unregulated mind that can so offend against our reasonable game-laws—of what is it not capable? It argues the bird is wild—the bird is wild. It does not reflect that the bird has in many cases been expensively reared by hand. No—the bird is wild—'it is as much mine as others'." So the poacher argues. But the time comes when the mere wildness of the bird is nothing to him. He descends upon a poultry-yard. Some valuable turkey is seized and thrust into his bag. He spends the proceeds on drink—our national vice. In a drunken bout, he attacks his wife—his own wife—and beats his children, bone of his bone. Then, indeed, the end is in sight," said Mr. Bayford affectingly—"the end is in sight."

This brief disquisition upon the decline and fall

of the poacher was succeeded by a remark from Judith:

"My uncle was saying that Colonel Glemmy suspected the men here of poaching."

"It's easy enough to suspect a man," said Blenkenstein, rather impatiently, "but I dare say it's a mere suspicion. The men here may be very respectable."

"Of course," said Judith.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Boke was standing at that moment outside the mill, invoking anathemas upon the name of Coppenwell. That young man, weary of the mill's dull routine, had, in the teeth of orders, gone out with his gun, leaving Bilks and Mr. Boke to guard their prisoner. The warning that Colonel Glemmy was likely to have stuck to his threat, and had a watch kept on the woods, fell upon unheeding ears. Mr. Coppenwell, made impudent above his wont with high feeding and rum, vowed that he didn't care a tinker's damn for Colonel Glemmy, and he only wished he could meet the little tiger—he'd shoot him like a rabbit. He had been gone about half-an-hour before his first shot was heard, and Mr. Boke was walking up and down outside the mill in a considerable anxiety.

This was by no means diminished by the sudden advance upon him of Judith, Mr. Bayford, and Blenkenstein. For a moment, and before he recognized Blenkenstein, Mr. Boke feared that this was some hostile party, come to redeem his prisoner, and he was prepared to set his back against the mill, and defend it against all comers.

Mr. Bayford, who took it upon himself to conduct negotiations, undeceived him.

"Good-evening, good-evening," said Mr. Bayford. "I believe I address myself to the tenant of the wind-mill. Captain Bunbury, is it not?"

"That's it," said Mr. Boke.

"I trust, Captain Bunbury," said Mr. Bayford, "that you will pardon, in the first place, our intrusion. We are from The Ashlands; heralds, I may say, of a large party—of a very considerable party."

"Are you?" said Mr. Boke.

"All anxious," said Mr. Bayford, "to view this splendid scene by moonlight. We understood that the view from the top of the mill itself is something quite out of the common; and, indeed, it is to ask if you will grant us the favor of allowing us to ascend to that vantage point to-night that I have come ahead, at the request of Sir Jasper Mallendon. We ought, of course," added Mr. Bayford, "to have asked permission in the first place, and arrived in the second; but the expedition is, I may say, the result of a sudden inspiration, a proposal on the spur of the moment, which the ladies of the party could not resist acting upon."

"And they're coming up here, are they, to have a look from the top of the mill?" said Mr. Boke, pondering. He had recognized Blenkenstein, and seen his frown and shake of the head.

"With your permission," said Mr. Bayford.

"Well," said Mr. Boke, "I should have been glad to give it, if I could. I can't——"

"Dear, dear," said Mr. Bayford sorrowfully.

"The reason being," said Mr. Boke, with a side-long glance at Blenkenstein, to see if he approved the line of argument, "that my man's brother, who's been ill, is up there asleep. I had him down, poor chap, to

give him a chance o' recovery in the air up here, and there he is asleep."

"A kindly thought," said Mr. Bayford, obviously disappointed. "I suppose—er——"

"You see, he'd get waked if you went up," said Mr. Boke. "It wouldn't do at all. He's been bad—he's bad still. Besides, the ladies——"

"Oh, quite so," said Mr. Bayford, "quite so—quite so—quite impossible—quite. I am afraid there is nothing to be done, then, but to tell our friends that they must resign themselves to such views as they can get without going up. I see they are already arriving."

Mr. Boke saw it, too, and the numbers alarmed him. Suppose his prisoner began shouting. It wasn't likely that he would, but he might. His time was getting pretty close; and, from what Mr. Boke had observed, he was beginning to feel fairly desperate. There was only Bilks on guard, thanks to Coppenwell's disobedience. Or, suppose Coppenwell turned up in the middle of them.

"I tell you what," said Mr. Boke, in his anxiety to get this crowd of people away from the immediate neighborhood of the mill. "There's a fine view to be got to the left here. I'll put you on the way to it, if you like."

"Thank you, thank you," said Mr. Bayford, and explained to Sir Jasper and the others, who had now come up, what the mill's tenant had proposed. It seemed so well-intentioned and reasonable that Sir Jasper thought they could not do better than accept Captain Bunbury's offer to guide them to the point of outlook on the right.

"Facing south, I suppose?" he asked.

"Southeast by south," said Mr. Boke. "This way, if you please." He dived into a woody park, leading away from the mill, and the Ashlands party followed him—or perhaps it would be more correct to say that about half the Ashlands party followed him. The others, including Judith and Miss Finch, Jimmy and Butt, preferred to wander about by themselves; and the direction which the latter pair took was towards the mill.

Jimmy had not gathered what reasons Captain Bunbury had given for refusing entrance, nor would he have been disposed to accept them without test, even if he had. For his theory—that something shady, if not the young man who ought to have been in the wardrobe, but wasn't, then somebody or something, was concealed in the mill's solid structure—prevented him from being satisfied with a mere view of the outside.

Somber and mysterious from the outside the mill did indeed look, rearing up to the moon from the silver grass, and, as it reared, sloughing its black shadow like a snake's skin. But somberness and mystery do not dispel curiosity; they augment it.

"Come on, Butter," said Jimmy. "There's no one about now, let's go and have a squint." The field was empty of its recent visitors at the moment Jimmy and Butt entered at the low door, and found themselves in the ground floor room of the mill. A couple of candles flaming in beer-bottles on a rickety table showed the room to be of a fair size, circular, and weather-stained, but vacant of anything that might arouse particular interest. Some packing-cases that seemed to serve the purpose of chairs; blankets in the corner; a cupboard containing bottles, cheese, and

bread; some clothes of a fusty appearance, hung up on nails; there was nothing extraordinary in these. They conveyed nothing except the suggestion that Captain Bunbury had not gone very far towards furnishing his rooms.

"I vote we go up to the next floor," said Jimmy, and went up winding, creaking steps, that seemed half ladder and half staircase, into darkness.

"Get one of the candles," said Jimmy to Butt.

"You're having all the fun," complained Butt, when he had brought it, "and I'm having all the fag."

"You can go up the next steps first, if you like," said Jimmy generously. "And I'll hold the candle. This is only the second floor."

The second-floor room was like the first, built in a circle, but smaller, and showing, even more effectively, the stains and wear of time. Some of the machinery that had worked the mill in the days when grist came to it still stood in its place, silent and rusty; immobile, as though affixed for ever by the innumerable cobwebs that bound it. There was a great wheel in a grinding frame, so meshed and convoluted by the spiders that it seemed a hurricane might blow and never again shift it a hair's breadth. The room was calculated altogether to give one the shivers; which was perhaps why Mr. Boke and his companions had not used it; also why Butt, having been accorded the privilege of being first man up into whatever was above the trap-door overhead, hung back a little when he had got to the top of the ladder. It was a real ladder here, with worm-eaten steps.

"Do I——" said Butt, looking down upon Jimmy, who was balanced on a beam in the room below, "do

I just shove the trap in? I thought I heard somebody speaking."

"Yes," said Jimmy. "I suppose you're not funk-ing it, are you?"

To place such a supposition beyond the region of doubt, Butt thrust boldly at the trap, which shifted inwards gradually. It took some knocking, but went like a cork in the end.

"Buck in," said Jimmy. "I'll be after you in a mo'."

Butt bucked in obediently, and at once gave a yell, which caused Jimmy to drop his candle. It rattled to the floor below, being extinguished in its descent.

CHAPTER XXXI

A HOMERIC NIGHT

MR. FAVIEL had been sitting in the third-floor room of the mill for the best part of a week, and he had been getting tired of it. By day, the sun, driving into that little wooden turret, made it intolerably stuffy; the night winds, and especially those sharp winds that come with the dawn, penetrating easily through the cracks and crevices of the woodwork, turned sleep into a nightmare of creaking draughts.

If Faviel had been getting tired of the mill, it was not the mere weariness of the hopeless prisoner. He had been making plans for bidding good-by to the mill, making them with a lightheartedness that would have astonished Blenkenstein and even Boke. The lightheartedness, it is true, had succeeded something not unlike despair, which had lasted all the time he was being carried from the place where he should have met Judith to the mill. Quite apart from the fact that he had failed to keep his tryst, that second capture had seemed disastrous, for he did not doubt that Blenkenstein would follow it up by the delivery of the letter which would end the wager. He knew of course that Blenkenstein had broken the rules and not allowed him the two hours' start, but it was more than doubtful if he could prove it. Blenkenstein would deny it through thick and thin, and so probably would his employés, unless they were heavily bribed

to do the opposite; and corrupt witnesses are not of much avail, especially in a court, so to speak, of honor. No, Blenkenstein would win the wager if he delivered the letter.

It puzzled Faviel very greatly when the letter did not come; and only gradually, and by putting himself in the position of a person with a crooked mind, like Blenkenstein's, did he begin to see why the letter was delayed. Blenkenstein meant to keep him there till he had won both the wager and Judith—that is to say up till the very last moment. It was a good scheme too—Faviel gave his enemy all credit for it. He did not quite arrive at the full beauty of it—as from Blenkenstein's point of view, but he realized that, if successful, it left Blenkenstein in a much better position than the more obvious one of delivering the letter and still retaining his captive.

It was a good scheme, but it had, Faviel concluded, one fatal weakness in it, and that was that it assumed success instead of assuring it. The only way Blenkenstein could assure success was by delivering the letter, and the longer he delayed to do that, the less secure his success became. Faviel said to himself that in Blenkenstein's case he would have delivered it and kept his rival shut up all the same. That might be awkward and illegal, but it would have been sure, and avoided the mistake of despising one's foe. Faviel had to conclude that Blenkenstein thought very little of him. Boke would not directly answer any questions, yet he gave his prisoner to understand that he need not worry about expecting the letter until the last moment——

“’E knows you’re safe an’ happy,” Boke had said on one occasion, “and he don’t want to let you go

not a moment afore he's settled things as it seems you might interfere with."

"So it's a month, more or less, without the option of a fine?" Faviel had suggested.

"That's it."

"Ah!"

"An' don't you get frettin' about it," said Mr. Boke, not unsympathetically. "It ain't no bloomin' use—you can't 'elp it. There's three on us, and Bilks 'isself could lift you like as though you was a babby." . . .

"He's a strong chap," Faviel agreed, and wondered that Mr. Boke was such a fool as to take it for granted that mere avoirdupois must prevail against a desperate man. Even without being desperate, Faviel felt pretty certain that he could have taken on the hulking Bilks either in the ring (unless Bilks was a very fine heavyweight indeed, which seemed very doubtful)—or in one of those rough-and-tumbles in which his own knowledge of the snapable portions of the human anatomy—a knowledge he had picked up in Tokio—in many hours of wriggling with Japanese experts—would give him an incredible advantage.

But perhaps Boke was not such a fool as to be certain that the odds against his prisoner would keep the latter submissive for good and all. Boke might have reserves and reinforcements as yet unknown. It was because he did not know and wanted to find out before he made a dash that Faviel had kept quiet for so long. He meant to get out of the mill, but he knew that to do it he must make no errors. It would be a bad error to risk tackling all three of his warders at once, or even in succession, for if he failed once, the second attempt would be a lot harder. None of

these men were likely to encourage a second attempt, and they would have no compunctions about breaking his head.

Though he had kept very quiet on the whole, Faviel had also been getting tired of his companions. Apart from the motives of their fellowship they were not in themselves the sort of people Faviel would have chosen for a week's constant companionship in an overhead dungeon six feet by eight. Mr. Boke he did not object to. Mr. Boke had both humor and intelligence; also a delicate taste in tobacco. Mr. Boke's attitude was as a rule at once friendly and apologetic; and, except on the main point, he was rather with Faviel than against him.

Coppenwell, on the other hand, was wholly unbearable. Whether Coppenwell talked, laughed or sang, whether he was drunk or sober, Faviel's one desire was to shake Coppenwell. Indeed he had done it once when that young man, after his errand to The Ashlands, had ventured to comment in Faviel's presence on the appearance of Miss Mallendon. But for the rescue effected by Mr. Boke and Bilks, it is probable that Coppenwell would have left the third-floor room of the mill with more than a bump on his head and two teeth missing, and a sulky determination to pay his enemy out.

Bilks, the Hercules of Mr. Boke's party, was nothing like so unendurable as Coppenwell; but his brutish dullness—sometimes friendly enough, at others sullen—was apt to become oppressive. He it was who, in getting Faviel from behind in the glade near The Ashlands, had borne him off "like a babby" to the cart Mr. Boke had in waiting. Bilks was generally left in charge of the third-floor room, Mr. Boke's theory

being that, while it was practically impossible for his prisoner to get past Bilks, it was utterly impossible for him to get past without a rough-and-tumble that would bring himself and Coppenwell on to the scene.

There was a good deal in this theory—Faviel was thinking it again—as he sat opposite Bilks on the floor, half choked with the cavendish reek that came steadily from that worthy's clay. Yet if he was to escape, and the thing had to be effected soon, Faviel was not sure that he would not have to begin by getting past Bilks. In his prison week he had evolved a dozen other schemes of escape, from getting through the loophole window (usually kept closed) to setting the mill on fire in the night; but none of them had seemed wholly satisfactory. It looked as though a struggle with Bilks would be the best thing after all; and Faviel had practically decided upon it just about the time Jimmy and Butt entered the mill. The moment appeared unusually propitious. He had a pretty good idea that Coppenwell was not on the premises. Mr. Boke had let out some little time before some of his disgust at Coppenwell's insubordinate behavior; and the gun-shot that supplied Mr. Bayford with a text, had also supplied Faviel with a fair reason for supposing that Coppenwell was away.

If Coppenwell was away, Bilks could at the best be reinforced by Mr. Boke. Mr. Boke's wrists were not unlike handcuffs for hardness, but then he was weak on the legs. If Bilks could be placed *hors de combat*——

At this point in his deliberations Mr. Faviel first heard the voices of the Ashlands party. He did not recognize any of them, but in the clear night air he distinctly caught a word now and then. They were

talking to Mr. Boke about a view. A party of trippers probably on a moonlight picnic. They wanted to have a view of the mill.

Presently Faviel heard Mr. Boke—he fancied it was Mr. Boke, but he was not quite sure—saying, “This way.” Mr. Boke then, if it was Mr. Boke, was not in the mill any more than Coppenwell. He might indeed be some way from it.

Faviel looked across at Bilks. That squat Hercules was tranquilly pouring forth the usual clouds of smoke.

“I wonder who those people are?” said Faviel.

“Dunno,” said Bilks.

“From what I can hear,” said Faviel, “they seem to be wanting to look at the mill.”

“Not they,” said Bilks.

“And in that case you’ll be in rather a hole.”

The taunt was lost upon Bilks, who replied not at all to it, but smoked imperturbably on. The very fact that he made no answer irritated Faviel, though he knew the taciturn nature of the fellow.

“I said that in that case you’ll be in rather a hole.”

“Did ’ee?” said Bilks.

Faviel rose to his feet impatiently. The case of their wanting to see the mill was so hypothetical a one. They would not be allowed to in any case. No wonder the brute was so completely undisturbed. He stamped about impatiently.

But it seemed that Bilks was not so easy in his mind as his attitude seemed at first to suggest.

“Sit down again, can’t ’ee?” he grunted at Faviel, who had gone on to the closed loophole.

“I’m not going to shout to them, you know,” said Faviel. It was more or less understood that Faviel could not afford to summon assistance, since that might

lead to his discovery and the instant delivery of the letter, and the understanding had procured him fresh air before now.

"Don't keer," said Bilks, "sit down, can't 'ee——"

"And I'm not going to jump out," said Faviel. He wished to provoke Bilks into rising. He could not tackle him so well in a sitting posture, and moreover, he sat on the trap.

"Siddown, I said," growled Bilks.

"You needn't say it again," said Faviel, "for I'm not going to."

Mr. Bilks got to his feet. He was enormously thick, with long monkeyish arms, and short legs like a bear's; and as he lumbered across the room, his walk was not unlike that animal's.

"What do 'ee mean now?" he said. "Goin' to give trouble——?"

"Yes," said Faviel.

Bilks put out his arm for the hug, and Faviel slipped into the middle of the room. It was no good, he knew, thinking to make an artistic spun-out affair of the contest. The room was too small for him to evade that tremendous grip for very long. He slipped into the middle of the room, and as the other man wheeled slowly round, he went in under the hug and got his right fist plumb on the point of the jaw.

For a second Bilks clutched at the bright air that this stroke creates for the best and strongest of men, and in that second Faviel got in his right again, and his left. Bilks staggered and went over backwards. He must have struck his head on one of the protruding beams, for he lay stunned.

It was at this moment that the trap-door popped upwards and Butt popped after it. He had been right

in supposing that he had heard voices, though in truth he had not been certain about it. For the rest, his own knocking at the trap had precluded his hearing the noise of the contest overhead, which was in any case brief and sharp.

Faviel, for almost identical reasons, because, that is to say, he had been knocking at Mr. Bilks's face, had been equally deaf to Butt's approach.

It would be difficult to say whether he or Butt—neither of whom had before seen the other—was the more astonished at confronting one another, but it is on record that Faviel was the quicker in adapting the circumstances to his need. He did not know who this new arrival was, but the new arrival was on his knees still, and beside him lay the coat which Mr. Bilks always discarded in the evenings.

It was the effect of having Mr. Bilks's coat suddenly and stifflingly flung over his head like a sack, that caused Butt to emit the yell which, in its turn, caused Jimmy to drop the candle.

And while Jimmy was feeling for the lost light and shouting to Butt simultaneously, Faviel, with the trap-door replaced above his head, was feeling his way delicately down the ladder. He went so softly that Jimmy, still groping for the candle, never heard him, and so he went from the second floor to the ground and out into the moonlight.

In the still air he stood and listened. Away to the right, whither Mr. Boke had led his flock, voices were audible; and conscious that the field was ringed with barbed wire, except where the two paths led out of it, Faviel made for the left.

Judith, standing with Miss Finch and Etta Warley at the side of the field, saw him suddenly in a splash

of the moon, and he saw her at the same moment. He was bareheaded, and in the pallid light was not unlike a ghost, and as he saw her, he made as if to stop.

Then, as the voices from the right came nearer, he changed his mind, and, slipping into the shadow, went quickly by and plunged into the trees.

"I shall see you to-morrow," he said, as he passed.

"Who was that?" said Etta and Miss Finch, in a breath. They had not seen him coming, and in the shadows he was indistinguishable.

"I——"

Judith was saved an answer by the irruption from the mill at this point of Jimmy and Butt, full of excitement and shouting loudly. Jimmy had found the candle, and by its aid had discovered Butt squirming like an eel in Bilks's jacket, and Bilks himself lying stunned on the floor.

"He jammed it over my head," Butt had explained, when disentangled.

"Who?"

"The other chap."

"Which?" Jimmy pointed to Bilks.

"There must have been some one else."

"I expect he went by me in the dark then," said Jimmy. "Jolly lucky you weren't murdered, young Butt."

"Let's get out," said Butt, feeling creepy at this retrospective possibility.

"Yes, we'd better get help," Jimmy said, a little creepy himself, and they found the field and their lungs, just as Faviel plunged into the trees, and Mr. Boke, who had been delayed by talk with Blenkenstein, arrived back in that gentleman's company.

Butt calling "Murder," lustily, was Mr. Boke's first intimation of the calamity that had befallen in his absence.

"What is it?" he asked sharply.

"Man murdered in the mill," said Jimmy, "and murderer bolted. We went up to see."

"Curse you young monkeys!" said Mr. Boke. "Which is murdered?"

"A big heavy chap," said Jimmy. "I don't know that he's dead, you know."

Mr. Boke had drawn Blenkenstein aside.

"That's Bilks. Mr. Faviel's got away—damn those young monkeys."

"Sink yourself for a fool," said Blenkenstein savagely. "What did you want to leave him for?"

"How could I help it?"

"What are you going to do?" asked Blenkenstein, who saw his money in the scales again, and inclining to the other side.

"Catch him if I can," said Mr. Boke. "If you and one or two of the gentlemen will help me." He turned, without waiting for an answer, to the ladies. "Did any of you ladies see any one pass?" he asked.

"Yes," said Miss Finch. "A man ran past us into the woods. Is it—is he——?"

"It isn't anything but that my man's brother's got away," said Mr. Boke coolly, "after knocking my man on the head. Thanks to these young gentlemen's interference. The poor chap was a bit off his head. Delirious, you know."

"He said"—Miss Finch shuddered at the recollection—"that he would see us again to-morrow!"

"Is that so?" said Mr. Boke, throwing Blenkenstein a glance.

"He certainly did say so," Etta agreed. Judith had not spoken.

"Well, I hope to see him again to-night," said Mr. Boke. "Now, sir," Mr. Boke addressed himself to Blenkenstein as to a stranger. "I take it it's your fault and your friends' that this has happened, but it ain't no good talking about that. What I want to know is, if you and another gentleman or two 'll help me to catch him."

Sir Jasper, Mr. Bayford, and the others had come bustling up, having heard Butt's yells. Sir Jasper offered his assistance as soon as he understood, Mr. Bayford offered that of Mr. Wormyer. "An opportunity for you, Wormyer—an opportunity for you. I fear I am not fleet enough myself." And three other men of the party, including O'Levin, also volunteered.

"Hadn't you better go and see to the man who was knocked down, Sir Jasper?" suggested Blenkenstein.

"Yes, pray stay with us," said Miss Finch.

"And keep those boys back," said Mr. Boke. "Now, gentlemen, quick's the word. We'll spread, if you please. There ain't much chance," he added, starting off with Blenkenstein. "He's got three minutes' start, but we might just strike him."

"If you don't, you can whine for your money," said Blenkenstein. He was almost beside himself with fury. Almost at the last moment it looked as though his plan had failed completely. He had not even delivered the letter. It was still in his pocket, as he spoke.

"One o' my men, Coppenwell, is keeping a watch in the woods," said Mr. Boke, disregarding the tone. "He may 'a' seen him. And if we don't catch him

to-night, you heard what the lady said?—we may see him to-morrow.”

Three minutes’ start may seem sufficient for a desperate man in a woodland country, but in something less than a quarter of an hour Faviel realized that he might have had more with advantage. For one thing, he had not expected so instant a pursuit as had been organized by Mr. Boke, and was astonished to hear people behind him among the trees before he had got any very long way. For another—and this was what mattered, for, assuming pursuers in his wake only, he could easily enough keep ahead—he found out, almost at the same time as the pursuit first made itself heard, that something in the nature of a blockade was being formed in front of him. The truth is that Faviel’s front, which on ordinary occasions might have been presumed open and unguarded, happened, by force of circumstances, to correspond with Mr. Coppenwell’s rear.

Colonel Glemmy and six keepers were in fact in hot pursuit of that gentleman, and Mr. Coppenwell, retiring at an uneasy trot on the mill, was drawing the seven right across Faviel’s path. The suspicion of what was occurring and the confirmation of his suspicion were presented to Faviel simultaneously at a singularly awkward point. He had issued from out of a pathless, but open portion of the wood, into one of the many straight alleys cut through it for shooting purposes, and, running down this, observed that the hitherto dispersed trees on either side had closed up into a stifling underwood of hazel and bramble through which progress would be slow and thorny in the extreme. Shouts from behind indicated that some person or persons were on the shooting path in his rear.

He ran on, thinking to turn off into the trees as soon as their density should show signs of lessening. At a bend in the path, he almost ran into Coppenwell. That young man, breathless and defiant, had turned at bay in this strategic pass, and had his gun pointed at three men who were slowing up on him at a distance of some twenty yards.

He did not hear Faviel behind him, being busied with the frontal attack.

"I'll shoot, if you come higher," he shouted at the three men.

"You dare, you rascal!" said some one, who was indeed Colonel Glemmy.

"Putt your goon up!" said one of the keepers.

But Mr. Coppenwell kept it pointed, heedless of the crackling on either side that indicated to Faviel's ears that a flank attack through the brushwood was also being developed both on the right front and the left, while sounds of running were fast becoming audible to the rear.

The end to this strained position came more quickly than Faviel had expected.

Colonel Glemmy and his supporters, mistaking the rearward approach for the completion of their flank attack, feinted a rush. Coppenwell fired, flung his gun away, and, with an oath, plunged into the brushwood on his left. Faviel at the same moment dived into the right-hand thicket, just evading the keeper who was coming out.

Mr. Wormyer (for he it was who was first along the shooting-path from behind) valiantly, and with flying coat-tails, dashed into the center of Colonel Glemmy's main force. He was promptly knocked down.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE LAST DAY—(1)—DAWN. MR. COPPENWELL RATS

THE pinks of dawn were stealing over a sky soft and silvery as birch-bark when Blenkenstein entered that glade outside The Ashlands which Faviel had appointed a week before for his tryst with Judith. Silvery gossamers hung between the green of the trees and the taller grasses; the dew-drenched turf looked as if it were spilled over with quicksilver. Night still lingered between the tree-trunks, while the birds had begun to twitter doubtfully, as though the lightening overhead might be stars and not the day; but in the open glades there was no mistaking the dawn.

Blenkenstein had no eye for it, save as a point of time. He had fixed the glade as a place in which to meet Coppenwell, and Coppenwell had not yet come. Could he by any luck have got on to Faviel's track? After the fiasco caused by Mr. Wormyer's mistake—Blenkenstein referred to it as such, though, as Mr. Wormyer pointed out, the mistake was made rather by Colonel Glemmy's gamekeeper—all trace of Faviel had been lost. The gamekeeper, who had been trying to outflank Coppenwell on the right, said he made a grab at somebody, but it might have been a stoat for all he laid hold of. The gamekeeper on the left had not even had cause to make a grab, for Coppenwell, discreetly retiring—instead of breaking through as Faviel had done—reappeared as one of the party in

pursuit of the madman from the mill; and, since every one was in confusion as to who was who, and what was the next thing to be done, and Coppenwell had not at any time been within recognizable distance of Colonel Glemmy's men, he succeeded in his ruse perfectly.

Explanations between the two parties had of course been exchanged, explanations of a sort—and Mr. Wormyer had been restored from a state of inanition to one of heroic self-consciousness by a dose of brandy from Colonel Glemmy's own flask. Partially supported between two gamekeepers, Mr. Wormyer had then trudged back to the mill with the others, where a large bump on his head was discovered. It was rubbed with butter by Mr. Bayford, while further explanations were entered into by Colonel Glemmy and Sir Jasper Mallendon.

Bilks, who was in a very similar condition to that of Mr. Wormyer, only sullen instead of blissful, was cross-examined by Colonel Glemmy, but having previously been seen by Coppenwell—on Blenkenstein's instructions—stuck to the story of the delirious brother. The only weak point in his evidence was his statement that "he'd like to get back on him, he would——"

"On your own brother, my man?" said Mr. Bayford, shocked. "Your own invalid brother——?"

"He 'adn't got no call to kick me on the 'ead," said Bilks, who was convinced that this was the way he had come by his injury. "I'll bang 'im, if I git a-hold of 'im——"

"Dear, dear," said Mr. Bayford, "this is hardly fraternal; this is, I may say, inhuman——"

"O, stow it," said Bilks sullenly.

“Well, well, well,” said Colonel Glemmy. “It’s the sort of thing one expects with this class of fellow. What? Kill their own father. What? Rogues, you know, rogues, rogues. Personally, don’t believe a word the feller says. D’ye hear me, feller, don’t believe a word you say. What? Not a word. But I s’pose there’s nothing to be done to-night, Mallendon, eh, what? Where are the other two, or half-dozen? Score, I dare say. Thick as wasps—wasps, what?”

Sir Jasper said he fancied there were only three, or four, including the delirious brother. One of them had been with their party and had come back. So had the other, only he hadn’t come back, being still on the track of the unfortunate invalid, Sir Jasper supposed.

“Dare say he was the man with the gun—what?” said Colonel Glemmy. “Well, I’ll smoke ’em out yet—smoke ’em all out.”

Mr. Boke was the one who had not returned, when Sir Jasper’s party left, and that is why Blenkenstein had arranged with Coppenwell to meet him in the glade at dawn. Blenkenstein could not rest long without tidings of some sort, or without fixing up some last trap for Faviel. There was still time to catch him, he said to himself; and almost persuaded himself that Coppenwell had good news to bring him, when that young man did at last make his appearance. An unwashen blink-eyed appearance it was.

“You’re late,” said Blenkenstein, sourly enough. The Ashlands party had got back after midnight, and it was about half-past three, now. Blenkenstein was feeling the effects of not having slept more than an hour.

“Hi’ve bin arter ’im the ’ole night,” said Coppenwell protestingly. “That’s why I’m a bit latish.” He

had, as a matter of fact, slept peacefully at the mill from the moment the Ashlands party left it.

"Well, have you found him?" Blenkenstein asked.

"No," said Coppenwell. "I haven't found 'im, not exactly."

"And that fool Boke?"

"Not 'e," said Coppenwell. "'E ain't come back, ain't likely to. Hit's 'is fault the 'ole thing's mushed. If he'd bin in the mill, now. But there, Boke ain't up to the work. Hit's the third time 'e's let 'im go——"

"What?" said Blenkenstein.

Mr. Coppenwell had conceived a characteristic plan. It had occurred to him that, their work having come to naught, Mr. Boke was not likely to be in high favor with his employer. Nor, as one of Mr. Boke's assistants merely, was he—Coppenwell—likely to be in high favor either. But as the man who ought to have been in command, as the man who had accomplished whatever had been accomplished, who had given warnings, which, if regarded, would have made success certain, as such a man, Coppenwell might perhaps be so disassociated from Boke in Mr. Blenkenstein's mind, as possibly even to succeed him in Mr. Blenkenstein's employ. Not for this job. Mr. Coppenwell was pretty sick of this job, but Mr. Boke had informed him that there were things to be done occasionally for the Imperial Cities Exchange, Ltd., which were worth doing.

He told the story of Mr. Boke's failures now in an ingenious way that emphasized their futility and the soundness of the advice he had wasted on Mr. Boke. But Blenkenstein was not content merely to listen to the history of Mr. Boke's failures.

"I know he's a fool," he said. "Biggest fool I

ever saw. You may be smart, as you're trying to make out; but are you going to get hold of our man again? What did you mean by saying you hadn't exactly found him?"

Mr. Coppenwell had not meant anything in particular; but he had the shrewdness to see that merely hazy hints would be wasted.

"What I meant, sir," he said, "was that, hif you like, the other man and I'll go on with the 'unt for to-day. If we don't get 'im, we don't. But I've a notion we might."

"How?"

"Why," said Coppenwell, "as Hi've 'eard, 'e's goin' to turn up to-day. Where? Hat the show. Where helse would 'e? Me an' Bilks 'll keep a watch, an' hif we spot 'im, we nab 'im."

Blenkenstein was conscious that the ingenuity which the young man had shown in slandering Mr. Boke was absent from this plan, which, indeed, Mr. Coppenwell only offered on the spur of the moment. But Blenkenstein was ready to clutch at straws.

"I'll give you two hundred pounds, if you do," he said.

Mr. Coppenwell's eyes glistened.

"Hif Bilks and me spots 'im," he said, "Hi wouldn't give much for his chance o' getting away. Bilks is pretty keen to meet 'im—Bilks is, hand I've got one against 'im myself."

Blenkenstein looked at him, and the thought that had first occurred to him when the proposal to visit the mill had been broached at the Mallendons' recurred to him with increasing force. He had not shrunk from it then—not altogether—though Faviel's escape had then been but the barest possibility. Now this rival

whom he hated was free, had got the better of him, threatened to destroy all his hopes. What right had a man he hated to steal from him? . . . He remembered that Coppenwell was the person he had thought of as likely instrument in case of need. Looking at Coppenwell with his pallid face, receding chin, vicious eyes glistening with the mere idea of having his revenge, he saw that he had judged right.

"Look here!" he said. "If you meet him, I don't want any more risks taken." They were all by themselves in the glade, but instinctively Blenkenstein dropped his voice to a harsh whisper. He wanted no witnesses. Coppenwell luckily wanted very little persuasion. Blenkenstein offered him double the previous price if, in addition to discovering Faviel, he succeeded in doing something to him that was not actually put into words. Blenkenstein did not believe in words either, if you could do without them.

He left the glade moodily enough. In spite of Coppenwell's viciousness, there was little enough in his plan to make success likely. Unless, of course, Faviel did turn up. But would he? Would he risk losing the wager at the last moment? He was fool enough, if he thought it made the difference with Judith. Blenkenstein, with a sudden quickening of the blood, realized that he was fool enough in that event himself. And the event still hung doubtful. After all these days, he was no surer of what her answer would be than before. She had indeed seemed less distant during the last week, when he had been more careful of playing his cards. Last night, for example, after his return from London, she had seemed pleased to see him. She had accompanied him on the drive, unasked; and, unasked, she had walked up with him

through the moonlit woods to the mill. But for Mr. Bayford's presence Blenkenstein would have asked her then. Later, the night had become mere confusion for everybody. Well, he would play the fool in that confounded play early to-morrow afternoon—no, it was this afternoon, he suddenly remembered—and as soon as that was done, he would try his luck. He got back to his bed dog-tired, and was waked from a dream, in which all went well, by the information that a boy had come up with a message from the village to the effect that a man wanted to see him there on important business.

Looking at his watch, Mr. Blenkenstein found that it was 10:30.

"Tell the boy, will you," he said, "that I'll come round in about half an hour. Where is the man waiting, did you say?"

"At the 'Anchor,' sir."

Now a man does not snatch sleep for about five hours at the outside—and that in two doses—and be roused from his first pleasant dream to go for a half-mile walk before breakfast without feeling the effects of it. Blenkenstein reached the "Anchor" Inn in a state of high irritability, and when he saw that it was Mr. Boke who awaited him there, he held himself in with difficulty.

"Well," he said curtly, "have you found him?"

"No," said Mr. Boke. "I haven't found him—not exactly."

It was Coppenwell's answer, and Blenkenstein had not been pleased with the wretched evasion then. It broke down his patience altogether now.

"Then what the devil, you fool, do you want to fetch me out here for?"

Mr. Boke had not even snatched five hours' sleep, or had so much as the beginning of a pleasant dream. On the contrary, the reflection that had been with him most of the night was that quite undeservedly he was in danger of losing not only the credit, but also the pay, for what had been—but for bad luck—a skilfully conducted campaign. Blenkenstein had let forth some of his venom on him during the run through the woods. Mr. Boke, therefore, was not, any more than Mr. Blenkenstein, in his most patient mood.

"Quietly, sir, quietly," he said, in his husky, affable voice. "I fetched you out because I had something to say—what about the payment for this month's job? I haven't had any yet, you know, sir."

It was not for this that Mr. Boke had in the main fetched Blenkenstein out, but he could not resist beginning with it. They had left the inn, and were walking along the country road leading back to The Ashlands. There was no one about, and Blenkenstein relieved his mind. He had told Boke before that he might whine for his money, and he told him why now.

"Who did you get all this from?" asked Mr. Boke, as Blenkenstein rapped out the score of the failures to secure Faviel.

"That man of yours. He's not such a fool as you, at any rate. He warned you."

"Ah, Cop's a smart lad—in his way," said Mr. Boke reflectively. "Well, sir," he added, as they came to the lodge-gate, "I see you're going to round on me. I don't say nothin' about langwidge—having heard Billingsgate afore now—and I don't say nothin' more about the pay, just at present anyway. I might, o' course, make things a bit awkward for you, knowin' what I know."

"I'll have you locked up, if you try," said Blenkenstein.

"All I'm goin' to say at present," said Mr. Boke, in an alarmingly affable voice, "is that you are the fool, sir, and, what's more, the biggest, screwiest, narrow-eyed'st fool I've struck for a long time. Excuse my langwidge, sir," said Mr. Boke, lifting his hat politely, "but truth will out, as they say. Never mind, you trust Cop—smart lad, Cop—in his way. Lost it at the last mo'," he continued to himself, as Blenkenstein hurried off, hardly able to trust himself from assaulting his late agent—"that's what he's done. Well, fools is fools, and here's for Waybury an' Miss Faviel. She will pay like a lady for a vallyable nephew."

And towards Waybury Mr. Boke set his face, and feet that were becoming distinctly weary.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE LAST DAY—(2)—TWO O'CLOCK P.M. AT THE CHARITY FÊTE

FOR the past hour or more all roads had been leading to The Ashlands, and people on foot and people in wagons, and motors and gigs and barouches and landaus and wagonettes and dogcarts, people in smart turnouts and people in vehicles more ancient and a good deal more rickety than omnibuses, had been flocking thither. The hedges on the road between Waybury and The Ashlands were as white with dust as the way to Epsom, and in cross-country lanes, where, as a rule, the rattle of wheels was never heard, chickens and ducks were still all fluttering from repeated flights across the very noses and under the very hoofs of strenuous and alarming quadrupeds.

The yard of the "Anchor" Inn, and its adjoining meadow, were like some port crowded with masts, so many shafts stood up from them; and wherever there was a patch of shade, and sometimes where there wasn't, some horse or pony was tethered. The "Anchor's" solitary ostler was so wet with running about, feeding and watering, that one hardly knew if the streams of water that splashed about him, as he went, came from his face or his bucket.

The "Anchor" flew a flag, and so did one or two of the cottages, to show that Hetchingham understood how to make holiday; and the general shop had no-

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tices about lemonade, biscuits, and ginger-beer pasted up outside its window with such thick paste that the wasps seemed to have come prematurely into season merely in order to enjoy the feast; while the proprietor, who had hoped further to attract custom by standing at the door in a white apron, was swearing in his back parlor with a blue-bag pressed firmly to his thrice-stung head.

But it was the grounds of The Ashlands—when you had passed the lodge-gate where the Hetchingham policeman stood issuing tickets, and getting a good deal muddled about the change, though the entrance fee was the round sum of a shilling (children sixpence)—that struck you, as Mrs. Cleavin said to Mr. Dunt, as they passed through the gate together, “all of a heap.”

“Of course, I know’d,” said Mrs. Cleavin, “that it ’ud be lookin’ nice, this time o’ year. But I never did think they’d a got it so gorgeous as this. Cocoa-nut shies, I do declare, and a merry-come-up.”

“Merry-go-round,” suggested Mr. Dunt.

“That’s when they haven’t got birds for hosses, isn’t it,” said Mrs. Cleavin. “Do but look at the ’chine there.”

The machine in question was a tall obelisk, with numbers up the face of it, and a springboard in front, which, upon being struck with a hammer, caused a metal band to travel up the obelisk at a rapid pace. The harder the hammer struck, the higher was the number registered; and if you had the requisite strength, you could drive the metal hand up to such a height that a bell rang.

“I do declare that man’s a-goin’ to ring it,” said Mrs. Cleavin, as a very square and powerful man de-

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livered a mighty blow with the hammer. "No, he isn't. Yes, he are."

And, sure enough, as Bilks brought down the hammer-head, the registering hand went up with an incredible rapidity, and the bell rang.

"There's that man from the 'Sow an' Pigs' going to try now," said Mrs. Cleavin, "the one as lost his horse and cart t'other day. Oh, he haven't rung it."

The pink-faced man, who, spurred on by some fellow coachman, had indeed essayed the feat of strength so successfully performed by Bilks, and failed ignominiously, retired, pinker-faced than ever, from before the obelisk, cheered by various small boys.

"Let's go and get seats for the play," said Mrs. Cleavin to her farmer. "I do love a play more than anythin', and they say Miss Mallendon—Miss Judy, as my friend up to the house here calls 'er—looks lovely in it. It's a-goin' to be acted be'ind the house, so I'm told, in the garden itself, as you might say."

"What's the price o' seats?" said Mr. Dunt.

"Threppence, back seats," said Mrs. Cleavin. "They'll do nicely, if they ain't filled."

They were not filled, as it happened, though very nearly so, and Mrs. Cleavin and Mr. Dunt secured very comfortable chairs two rows from the back on the outside, from which point, as Mrs. Cleavin observed, they could not only see the play itself, but also all the people in front. Mrs. Cleavin, familiar with the place, enjoyed herself pointing out various celebrities to Mr. Dunt, who spent too much time on the land really to know who was who.

"There's Sir Jasper Mallendon," she said, pointing cheerfully, "and there's Lady Mallendon, tall, with the gray hair an' vi'lets in her bonnet. And, I do

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declare, if Colonel Glemmy haven't bin an' come. Somebody's cottage 'll have to pay for that, unless they let 'im in without payment, which is quite likely, the fam'lies knowing one another. An' the thin lady in the gray dress a-speakin' to him is Mrs. Mordant, and—whatever be the matter, Mr. Dunt?"

Mr. Dunt, who had started violently in his seat and half risen, sat down again with a jerk.

"There's th' lad as fired at me t'other day a-coming along here, I'm dyshed if it isn't," he said, breathing deeply.

"Where?" asked Mrs. Cleavin.

"Theer." Mr. Dunt pointed with a square finger.

"Why, it can't never be," said Mrs. Cleavin.

"That's Master Jimmy Mallendon."

"That's the lad," said Mr. Dunt obstinately.

"And I'm goin' to teach 'im summat in another minute. Wait till he comes up—dyshe 'im—I'll teach 'im."

"Oh, you mustn't go an' make a brawlin' here, Mr. Dunt. You really mustn't," said Mrs. Cleavin anxiously.

"Brawlin'," said Mr. Dunt, "or no brawlin', I'll teach 'im." He gripped the sides of his chair to keep himself taut for the supreme moment when the unwitting Jimmy, who, in his best flannels, and with a rose in his buttonhole, was selling programmes down the rows, should place himself within his grasp. Mrs. Cleavin hardly knew whether to cry a warning or not, as Jimmy drew closer and closer to the violent-minded farmer.

"You really mustn't," she murmured again, and shut her eyes as Jimmy, stepping easily between the chairs, placed himself, so to speak, in the lion's mouth.

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Jimmy opened his eyes as he simultaneously drank in the farmer's identity and his purpose. Mr. Dunt had unclenched his grip of the chair, and his fingers were moving to the front of Jimmy's collar. With a happy realization of the emergency, Jimmy stood stock still and slipped a programme into the farmer's right hand.

"Only sixpence," he said, "and it goes to a charity, you know. Why, here's Mrs. Cleavin," he continued cheerfully. "How are you, Mrs. Cleavin? It's very good of Mr. Cleavin to buy a programme. We want the money badly, you know."

"Oh, lor, oh, Master Mallendon, so it is," said Mrs. Cleavin, too astounded for the moment to correct Jimmy's mistake. Mr. Dunt was holding the programme as though it had been a viper suddenly dropped upon him from the skies.

"Mr. Cleavin's looking well," said Jimmy.

"But it ain't Mr. Cleavin," said Mrs. Cleavin, with a blush. "This is Mr. Dunt, a neighbor o' mine. I'm a widder woman, ye see."

"Oh, yes, of course," said Jimmy. "I don't suppose you will be for ever, though, Mrs. Cleavin. What do you think, Mr. Dunt?"

"I'm a-thinkin'," said Mr. Dunt slowly, and with much effort, "I'm a-thinkin'——" What Mr. Dunt was thinking was not destined to be put into words, for Mrs. Cleavin broke in, with another becoming blush:

"You really oughtn't to say a thing like that, Master Mallendon. You really oughtn't——"

"Well, I expect it's done," said Jimmy. "But I won't say it again, if you think I oughtn't to. If Mr. Cleavin, I mean Mr. Dunt, has found that six-

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pence, I'll be moving on. Thank you. Hope you'll enjoy the play."

And to Mrs. Cleavin's unbounded amazement, Jimmy moved on, the richer by Mr. Dunt's sixpence, and Mr. Dunt sat as though cast into a trance, with his mouth slightly open, and the programme still gripped tightly in his right hand, where Jimmy had placed it.

Mrs. Cleavin had the tact to say nothing, and, as, a couple of moments afterwards, O'Levin came upon the stage, in the capacity of manager, to make an announcement preparatory to the play beginning, the incident terminated.

O'Levin said that he had to crave the indulgence of the audience on behalf of one of the actors.

"When I mintion," said O'Levin, unable to resist a short oration, "that our leading shepherd, who, besides being chief of the chorus, is, perhaps, the natest dancer of the flock, received upon the top of his head—as recently as 11:45 last night—a blow that caused a swelling not smaller than a turkey's egg, I feel sure that ye will forgive any shortcomings that may ensue in the course of the play. A turkey's egg on the top of one's head, as those who have ever tried one will be the first to admit, is not calculated to stir the corybantic instinct, even if ye have reduced it—I mane the swelling—with the best salt butter, and a pound and a half of rump steak. Our shepherd would, indade, in the opinion of many, be entitled to withdraw his assistance from us this afternoon. But he is not only a shepherd, he is not only chief of the chorus and a nate dancer, he is more, ladies and gentlemen, he is, if I may use the expression at this early hour in the afternoon, a jolly good fellow. Ladies and

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gentlemen, I refer to Mr. Wormyer, on whose behalf I crave your indulgence once more before the gong sounds for our little dhrama to commence."

O'Levin's speech having been received with much clapping of hands and a "Bravo, Wormyer," from Mr. Bayford, the gong, which had been specially devised by O'Levin to supply the place of a curtain, did sound and the play began.

It is not incumbent upon us, as it was upon those who had paid threepence for their seats, to follow this dramatic representation of the simpler life through all its scenes, enlivened as they were by O'Levin striking the gong whenever any one forgot his words or came on or wouldn't go off at the right moment. Rather, at another part of the field, we will follow a conversation (since it throws some light—for the observant—on certain events that were to follow)—we will follow a conversation there that was taking place between Police-Constable Bigstock and the pink-faced man.

Police-Constable Bigstock was on duty. He had been borrowed from Waybury to keep that order which, unaided and confronted by such crowds of people, the local policeman would have been unable to enforce. Strolling from point to point, Mr. Bigstock cuffed mischievous boys, directed inquiring ladies, arbitrated in disputes concerning cocoanuts with an austere dignity that moved the Hetchingham man, a younger and meeker person, to shrink into his tunic even more than—being thin himself and having succeeded a stout man in his post—he naturally would have done. In the course of one of his rounds, Mr. Bigstock espied the pink-faced man, and not having come into contact with him since they had accom-

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panied Jimmy to The Ashlands together, greeted him with a friendly patronage:

"Well, Sam," he said, "how 'a' you bin gettin' on since I tracked that there hoss an' cart for you?"

"Awright, thank'ee," said the pink-faced man.

"Druv' over here, I s'pose?" said Mr. Bigstock.

"Twice," said the pink-faced man. "I druv' the Chinyman what they're puttin' up the tent for early this mornin' from Waybury Station, and I've druv' the lady with the little dawg this arternoon. I did think," said the pink-faced man, who having failed at the strength-machine once, had prudently reserved the rest of his loose cash for refreshments, and was therefore in a confidential mood, "I did think as there'd be another job for you with that there Chinyman."

"How was that, Sam?" asked Mr. Bigstock gravely.

"Why, I nearly lost 'im. Thought I had—same as the hoss an' cart. And it wouldn't 'a' bin my fault any more than what that was. I druv' 'im straight enough, an' at the halfway 'ouse——"

"You stopped for a drink," said the sleuth-hound.

"No, I didn't," said the pink-faced man. "A genelman stopped us. That's how it was. Held up his hand—it was just afore we come to the halfway 'ouse——"

"I knew you hadn't come to it," said Mr. Bigstock.

"Held up 'is hand and began a-jabbering to the Chinyman in Chiny. Leastways, it wasn't nothin' I've ever heard afore. Arter 'e'd jabbered a lot and the Chinyman 'ad jabbered back, says the Chinyman to me, 'You wait 'ere a bit,' says he——"

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"In Chiny?" queried Mr. Bigstock.

"No, I shouldn't 'a' understood 'im if he'd said it in Chiny," said the pink-faced man. "'E said it in English—same as I'm sayin' it to you now—' You wait 'ere a bit,' says 'e. 'I'm a-gittin' out.' And out 'e gits, what's more, and goes off with the genelman—why—for the matter o' half an hour or more—leavin' me standin' there in the mid o' the road. I thought 'e was lost for certain——"

"I shouldn't wonder but what 'e'd gone on to have a drink at the halfway 'ouse," said Mr. Bigstock. "'E didn't want you to see: that's what it was. They're shy birds, them Chinies."

"It might 'a' been that," said the pink-faced man argumentatively. "But if 'e'd bin havin' a drink, why did 'e look thinner when 'e come back than when 'e went away?"

"If 'e did," said Mr. Bigstock, who disliked argument, "it was the heat made 'im. You can take it from me, Sam, it was the heat did it. They ain't used to that."

"Ain't they?" said the pink-faced man.

"No," said Mr. Bigstock decisively, "they ain't, and they don't keer for it. I could ha' told you that from the fust, if you hadn't dragged your story out so. You take too long tellin' a story, Sam. It wouldn't do for the witness-box—that draggin' out wouldn't."

Thus squashed, the pink-faced man volunteered no further information. He had been about to inform Mr. Bigstock how on his return to Waybury he had come across the owner of the wardrobe lost on the previous occasion, and how he had seemed quite a different sort of man, chatty and agreeable. But the

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pink-faced man, being squashed, did not inform Mr. Bigstock of this. Nor consequently did he inform him that Captain Bunbury, on being told of the affair of the Chinaman and his apparent shrinkage in girth, had offered quite a different solution of the story. Captain Bunbury had said that probably the Chinaman had been distended in the first instance by an air-belt which Chinamen often wore to keep off the rheumatism—a malady to which they were very subject—and that during his walk the air had escaped from the belt.

It was a more interesting solution than Mr. Bigstock's, especially as the pink-faced man suffered from rheumatism himself.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE LAST DAY—(3)—FIVE O'CLOCK P.M.
THE BOOTH OF CHY FANG

THERE had been some discussion as to when the booth or tent of the Chinese juggler should be opened; and it had been finally settled that it should not be opened until after the play was over, as competition was not to be encouraged, when every penny was valuable.

"If Mr. Fang," as Lady Mallendon prudently remarked, "does his tricks at the same time as the play is being acted, people will either go to him instead of the play, or they will go to the play instead of to him—neither of which things is desirable. Besides, as he wrote to say, he would require some time to fit up his booth, and, I suppose, rest his rabbits and things after the train journey."

It was not until four o'clock, therefore, that the booth of Chy Fang was officially declared to be opened, and Chy Fang, according to an inscription outside, was prepared to Read the Future and Exhibit the Mysteries of Crystal-Gazing and other White Magics to such people as might elect to pay sixpence entrance fee. Later in the evening he was to give two or three successive entertainments in the conjuring line to a larger public.

"It was his own idea," said Lady Mallendon to Mr. Maxhaven, O'Levin's American friend, who had come over from some distance in order to see how

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an English country fête was conducted, "to Read the Future first. He said that conjuring went so much better later in the day, and he is so anxious to do his best for the charity."

"Is he?" said Mr. Maxhaven. "He must be a model Chink then. Out West they don't care, as a rule, what time of the day they begin conjuring, and they're mostly concerned for the charity that begins at home—if you can call it home."

"Really?" said Lady Mallendon. "I suppose the Chinese are not in general very nice people. But Mr. Fang is really charming. I wonder how he is getting on. Shall we go and see?"

"Sure," said Mr. Maxhaven.

The booth had been erected by Fang's desire in the front of the house, abutting on the drive. It was a spot that would take the twilight early, and enable the Chinese lanterns, with which Fang had provided himself, to be lit effectively almost earlier than anywhere else. The tent itself was adorned with pictures of dragons and slimy twisting creatures, such as only exist in the Chinese imagination, and—if we may believe the revelations of the microscope—in some of our London water supplies.

Paying their sixpences to the custodian of the tent, Lady Mallendon and Mr. Maxhaven entered, and found themselves in a roselit gloom, which a skilful arrangement of mirrors mystified considerably. Various emblems of celestial origin and make were strewn about, and on a pile of cushions on the ground at the back of the tent sat the Chinaman himself. He had on the most magnificent and voluminous silken robe, in which birds and beasts and flowers pursued each other in a labyrinthine pattern, and on his head was a hat

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like a beehive with side curtains that concealed his face. At his feet was a bowl filled with inky liquor, and a small cauldron emitting snapdragon flames. Also at his feet, both literally and figuratively—for he was seated on a cushion, shaking like a jelly—was a small foxy-faced elderly man, no other indeed than Mr. Green, who kept the second-hand furniture shop at Waybury.

"It was a fair price for that there wardrobe—it was indeed," he was saying, in a supplicating voice, as Lady Mallendon and Mr. Maxhaven entered.

"The bowl says otherwise."

"P'r'aps it ain't working right," said Mr. Green, with a miserable attempt at self-comfort. "It was a fine bit of oak—that wardrobe was—a fine bit: real good workmanship."

"The just tradesman doubleth not his price at the moment of a customer's need."

"I wouldn't ha' let it go under eight pound to anybody," said Mr. Green.

"Six was the sum of fairness."

"No, it warn't," said Mr. Green, stuttering. "Oh, lor!" The snapdragon had begun to spit and splutter in the fiercest way. Flames darted at Mr. Green's legs; they rose higher and higher; a fizzing noise made itself heard.

"Beware!" said Chy Fang, in a thrilling voice. "Fly!"

Mr. Green fled without more ado, and the flames instantly subsided. From behind his beehive hat Chy Fang serenely regarded Lady Mallendon and Mr. Maxhaven.

"Neat trick," said the latter approvingly. "You seem to have struck the old fellow's weak point, too."

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"Yes, indeed," said Lady Mallendon, much impressed. "I am afraid he cannot have been quite an honest man. But I don't know, Mr. Fang, whether—as it's for a charity, you see—you ought to frighten people too much. It might get about and prevent them from coming in. Of course it is very wonderful and magical, but I almost think"—Lady Mallendon dropped into her pidgin English at this point for the sake of emphasis—"not too muchee frightenee."

Chy Fang nodded gravely.

"There are few who deserve fear," he said. "For them it is good. For the rest they shall see only what is fair and pleasant. Shall the bowl show your eminence the rewards of the kindly heart?"

"Oh, no, thank you," said Lady Mallendon, not ill-pleased. "We only came really to see how you were getting on."

"Shall the bowl show the niece of your eminence what is in her heart?" asked Chy Fang dispassionately. "The hearts of maidens are not always clear to the maidens' own eyes."

Lady Mallendon hesitated.

"What would the bowl show?" she inquired.

"Truth," said the Chinaman briefly.

"Oh, that would be very nice," said Lady Mallendon. "Most interesting. I suppose it—it—" She paused. "I'll ask my niece if she wouldn't like to come and see the bowl. I'm afraid we must be going on now, Mr. Fang. I really think," she continued to Mr. Maxhaven, as they went out into the open again, "that he's very marvelous. I wonder if there can really be any magic in it?"

Mr. Maxhaven assured her that it was only smart faking.

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"In that case," said Lady Mallendon, "I believe that Mr. Fang could do us a great service, Mr. Maxhaven,"—Lady Mallendon had one of her bursts of confidence. "I dare say you know that my niece and Mr. Blenkenstein are—well, they are very nearly engaged. It is quite a love affair, if you will excuse my mentioning a private matter, only Judith, we fancy, cannot quite make up her mind. Now don't you think that if Mr. Blenkenstein and Judith were to go together to the booth, and Mr. Fang was to show her—in the bowl, you know, that Mr. Blenkenstein—do you see what I mean?"

Mr. Maxhaven allowed that he did.

"It would so simplify matters—for all of us," said Lady Mallendon. "Only, of course, it would be dreadful if Mr. Fang, or the bowl, didn't understand what was wanted, and made a mistake."

"If you like," said Mr. Maxhaven, with ready good humor, "I'll go back and give him a hint right now. He'll be only too glad to oblige. There's nothing a Chink won't do to oblige."

"It's exceedingly kind of you," said Lady Mallendon gratefully. "If you will just give him to understand how things are, I'll go and suggest to Mr. Blenkenstein that he should take Judith to the booth. It is really well worth seeing, isn't it?"

Lady Mallendon hurried off, and Mr. Maxhaven retraced his steps to the booth. There was a slight altercation going on between the custodian of the booth and a tall old lady, who had a stout small dog at the end of a string, as he came up.

"I cannot believe," the old lady was saying, "that there could be any objection to Monarch's going in with me. I am quite willing to pay sixpence for him,

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if necessary, but I will not leave him alone outside. I appeal to this gentleman"—she indicated Mr. Maxhaven, who had politely waited till her business should be over,—“to say if there could be any possible objection to my little dog going in with me.”

“Ma'am,” said Mr. Maxhaven, with a rich politeness, “I guess if you won't go in without the little dog, the Chinees will have to welcome the little dog. But if you'll allow me to precede you one moment, I'll fix it by asking Chy personally what his feelings are.”

“Thank you,” said Miss Faviel, and Mr. Maxhaven went in.

“Say, boy,” he said to the magician, with an easy disrespect, born of a familiarity with yellow men of the West, “here's a dollar for you, and when you're fixing the ink-pot for a young lady, Miss Mallendon,—I guess you know her, as you spoke about her awhile back—and the big man with her, remember he's her beau. Savvy?”

“The big man loves the niece of her eminence?” asked Chy Fang.

“Sure,” said Mr. Maxhaven. “And don't you forget it! And it'll help her a lot if you make the ink-pot show what a time she'll have with him, if she's only sharp. Sure you savvy?”

The Chinaman bowed with dignity.

“That's all right, then,” said Mr. Maxhaven, turning to go. “By the way, there's a lady wants to come in with her dog, and the box-office man won't let her. Shall I tell him to cut it out?”

“The lady may enter,” said Chy Fang, with a dignity which Mr. Maxhaven almost resented.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE LAST DAY—(4)—SIX O'CLOCK P.M. THE FLIGHT FROM THE BOOTH

BLENKENSTEIN scarcely knew whether to be annoyed or not that he had yielded to Lady Mallendon's suggestion that he should escort Judith to the Chinaman's tent and go through the mummary of seeing the future in her company. He did not believe in seeing the future, and he did not suppose Judith was much more credulous than himself. But then Lady Mallendon had hurriedly explained the strategy and had ended by saying it would be such an opportunity. An opportunity was what Blenkenstein craved. Somehow, though the play had been at an end for an hour or more, and he had decided that he would and could wait no longer for his answer from Judith, the psychological moment for putting his question did not seem yet to have arrived. He did not know how to put it into words—this feeling of his that kept him back. He was not sure, indeed, if it was something in himself or something in her that made him linger. With the last link only to be forged, it seemed as if he had become in some way paralyzed. Perhaps it was modesty that had been born in him for the first time—born of the prospect of undeserved and unutterably sweet success. Perhaps it was the beginning of the fear of unutterably bitter failure. If it was Judith's fault that he held back, it was not because she was

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unfriendly. She had been most gracious to him since his return, and provokingly gay therewithal. She had a look of expectancy about her—expectancy of what? The time she had fixed was up. Had she come more than halfway to meet him? Was she—could she be inviting him to question her again? Or could she, by some horrible chance, be expecting the end of the period fixed by the wager?

Blenkenstein hardly dared to think out the answers to these questions, which kept recurring as they walked together towards the booth. At one moment he thought that instead of going on, he would lead her out of the traffic of people into some quiet place, and then boldly make his proposal. At the next he decided that Lady Mallendon was right. The elementary methods of the fortune-teller that had ended in lovers meeting a million times in days of superstition would serve him as an opportunity now. He would not let it slip.

A dark handsome old lady with a yapping dog was coming out of the booth as they entered, and it struck Blenkenstein as not altogether a good omen when he heard Judith address her as Miss Faviel. He had heard of her and her futile pursuit of her nephew. He wished she could find him now, or, say, in about half an hour's time. Blenkenstein would save his money, if she could, as well as marry Judith. He had no hope personally that Faviel would behave so ridiculously as to turn up that day.

Miss Faviel, it seemed, was in a hurry.

"Have you seen Mr. Wilton anywhere?" she wanted to know. "I'm very anxious to get hold of him at once."

Judith said that she had seen Mr. Wilton, she

thought, walking round the gardens with Miss Etta Warley.

"Shall I send one of the men to look for him?" she suggested.

"Oh, no, thank you," said Miss Faviel. "I'll go myself. It's very kind of you to suggest it, but I expect that will be the quickest. It's particularly important."

She hurried off at a rate that made Monarch quite choke; and Blenkenstein and Judith entered the booth together. The dim rose light inside was dimmer now than when Lady Mallendon had visited it, and the cauldron's flames crackled low and unsteadily. The face of Chy Fang was almost invisible behind the curtains of his hat. He paid no attention to Blenkenstein, but made a deep obeisance to Judith, and said, in his grave monotonous voice—

"The niece of her eminence wishes to see into the future?"

"Yes," said Judith graciously.

"She wishes, perhaps, to see the face of her lover in the Pool of Blackness?"

Judith, it seemed, had not expected any question quite so old-fashioned and direct. She hesitated, and but that the light was altogether rosy, it seemed that the rose in her cheeks was deeper for the moment.

"Perhaps," she said, a little uneasily.

"If you're sure you can show it," said Blenkenstein. "It's exactly what I want Miss Mallendon to see." His courage went up as hers went down. He felt like seizing her hand and pressing it. He determined that at the right moment he would seize and press it.

"It can be done," said Chy Fang. "But there is

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one caution needful. Only the maiden may look into the pool, and no other face must cross it. Will his eminence therefore stand with his back to the bowl?"

For a moment Blenkenstein was disposed to contest this direction; but, inferring, from the arrangement of mirrors on the sides of the tent, that the trick was to consist in getting him into some position which would reflect his face in the pool in a manner that would to the ignorant seem magical, he turned his back obediently.

Judith, with her eyes fixed on the bowl, became aware that the cauldron had begun to spout flames. Higher and higher they rose, till it almost seemed the canvas overhead must catch fire. Then suddenly the Chinaman, who, like Blenkenstein, had turned his back on the bowl, bent over it sideways; and a face appeared in the inky liquor.

"Mr. Faviel!" cried Judith, in amaze.

Before Blenkenstein, in sudden realization of the trick that had been played upon him, could swing round, the cauldron had fizzed out, and a sweet smoke was pouring from the embers. It came so blindingly fast that in a few seconds the further end of the tent, to which the Chinaman had darted, was in a mist; and Blenkenstein stumbled and fell over something, that was in all probability some of the juggling properties the pseudo Chy Fang had brought with him. As he picked himself up, there came a puff of air from the back of the tent. Through a lifted flap of the canvas, Faviel, with his Chinese robes discarded, was vanishing.

"You'd better go out at the front," said Blenkenstein roughly, to Judith. "Something's happened, and

the man's bolted." He did not know if she understood what had happened, or not. It was possible that Faviel's identity with the Chinaman had not struck her. She could hardly have seen him in that moment of his disappearing.

She went out at the front obediently, while Blenkenstein found the flap at the back, and crept through it. The back of the tent opened almost directly upon a shrubbery which Faviel had just entered. The bushes were indeed shaking in Faviel's wake, as Blenkenstein emerged.

Most men in the madness of anger which possessed Blenkenstein would have followed their enemy without pause; but Blenkenstein, even in his rage, retained the gift of calculation. He wanted to confound his enemy as much as any man; but he wanted to catch him first. Single-handed he could not hope to do it. Single-handed he would not have dared to try it. In the hope of lighting upon Coppenwell or Bilks he ran round to the front of the tent.

Fortune, it seemed, was to favor his cunning. Attracted by the clouds of smoke which were rolling up from the tent, and by the door-keeper's shouts, (the door-keeper had imagined from Judith's startled egress that the tent had caught fire), a crowd of people was hurrying up from all directions. The two men he was looking for were almost the first Blenkenstein saw, and he beckoned them aside, as the others plunged into the tent with a view to rescuing the presumably asphyxiated Chinaman.

"He's gone this way," said Blenkenstein, hurrying his men round at a speed not so great as to attract attention.

"'Oo?" asked Coppenwell.

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"Faviel, less than a minute ago. There! the bushes are still moving."

A more exact calculation might have led Blenkenstein to the reflection that the bushes through which he and his men were making their way could hardly be quivering as they were from the effect of Faviel's flight. Two minutes had elapsed at least since he plunged into the shrubbery. And the bushes were as a matter of fact responding to the shock of a person who had passed less than a minute before.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE LAST DAY—(5)—BETWEEN SIX AND SEVEN
O'CLOCK P.M. IN THE WOODS OUTSIDE
THE ASHLANDS

MISS FAVIEL was last shown hurrying from the booth with Monarch at the end of a string, yapping excitedly. Miss Faviel's haste and Monarch's excitement were due to the same cause—namely, that they had pierced the disguise of Chy Fang.

Miss Faviel had arrived at The Ashlands in a highly detective spirit. Early that morning, and before she had started from the "Sow and Pigs," at Waybury, she had had a visitor, who, giving his name as Captain Bunbury, had insisted upon seeing her. Miss Faviel's surprise was considerable when, upon being shown up, Captain Bunbury had undertaken to discover her nephew for her by the next day at latest in return for the trifling consideration of a hundred pounds. It says much for Mr. Boke's sagacity that, having been thrown over by Blenkenstein, he should have conceived this simple method of reimbursing himself. It was so simple, that he wondered he had not thought of it before. For it involved him in no trouble—put practically no responsibility upon him at all. By the terms of the wager, which by this time Mr. Boke had mostly at his fingers' ends, Mr. Faviel would turn up to-morrow in any case. He would, in fact, discover himself. But Miss Faviel, of course, did not know that.

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She closed with Captain Bunbury's offer, in spite of the fact that he offered no explanation in response either to entreaties or threats, the more readily since, as Captain Bunbury himself pointed out, she would lose nothing if her nephew did not turn up—he did not ask for the hundred pounds in advance.

"If that's not a good enough guarantee, ma'am, I don't know what is."

"But if you can restore him to me to-morrow," said Miss Faviel, "you must know where he is at present."

"It doesn't follow, ma'am, not a bit of it," said Captain Bunbury frankly. "And, anyway, knowing where he is, is different from letting other people know. I don't, ma'am, to speak the truth, I don't believe in too many people being in a secret."

Miss Faviel could get no more out of him. Truth to tell, Mr. Boke had one fear. The only way by which his bargain could possibly fall through was by Blenkenstein and his late colleagues discovering what Mr. Boke had discovered from his purely accidental chat with the pink-faced man; the fact that Mr. Faviel, for the purpose of visiting The Ashlands, had changed places with his friend and *protégé*, the Chinese conjurer. This trick of Mr. Faviel's increased an admiration for him which had been growing in Mr. Boke's breast for some time past. It was, Mr. Boke considered, one of the subtlest and most sporting attempts that he had ever heard of. True, if he—Boke—had still been against him, Mr. Faviel would have ruined his chances at the last moment by this exchange of identities; but then Mr. Boke no longer was against him. And in any case, the pink-faced man's gossip

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was one of the sort of accidents that the most sagacious could hardly reckon with.

Nevertheless there undoubtedly remained chances of Mr. Faviel's being found out, and Mr. Boke determined to keep a watch in his interests. He had seen enough of Blenkenstein, and he knew enough of Copenwell and Bilks, to be conscious that they would stop at very little in order to have their revenge. He did not suppose that Blenkenstein would deliberately encourage a crime in order to win his wager, but he thought it not unlikely that Blenkenstein was sufficiently worked up to be reckless of the instructions he gave; in which case a ruffian like Bilks—if he got Mr. Faviel in a quiet place with no one looking on—would go as near murder as a good many men of his class frequently go, just for the sake of getting back on a policeman. There was nothing mild about Bilks when he was in a temper.

In pursuance of his determination to keep a watch, Mr. Boke had lurked outside the booth of Chy Fang most of the afternoon, keeping out of the way of his late colleagues as much as possible. Miss Faviel, during her altercation with the door-keeper of the booth, had noticed him. She had, as has been stated, arrived at The Ashlands in a highly detective mood, but this in itself would not have led her to infer anything from Mr. Boke's presence, but for what happened immediately she got inside the tent.

What happened was that—the moment Chy Fang spoke—Monarch ran up to him, with wagging tail and a series of pleased yaps. Then, the truth flashed across Miss Faviel. She kept her presence of mind, however, and betrayed no sign of self-consciousness. On the contrary, she allowed Chy Fang to go through

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some of his rites, with Monarch yapping excitedly the while, before she turned slowly and left the booth.

Once outside she hurried—in search of Mr. Wilton. He was the person to assist her. She had told him, when they met earlier in the afternoon, of the bargain she had struck with Captain Bunbury, and Mr. Wilton had rather pooh-poohed it. He seemed to doubt if Captain Bunbury was trustworthy. So did Miss Faviel, but that he had his eye on Richard—who must surely have departed from his senses—was now plain. If only she could find Mr. Wilton, he and she together could enter the booth and make a claim to Richard which no one could dispute, and would rescue Richard from the possibly evil eye of Captain Bunbury.

Unfortunately for Miss Faviel's plan, Mr. Wilton was not to be found. She went round the garden and he was not there, and she was returning by the front of the house, in case he should be near the cocoanut shies or the merry-go-round, when the smoke rising from the booth caught her eye and warned her of a possible catastrophe.

Miss Faviel ran; and Monarch, with failing legs and breath, and eyes bulging with the conviction that the end of the world had come, was dragged after her. Some men, who had entered the tent, were just coming out, as she reached it. Conspicuous among them were Police-Constable Bigstock and the pink-faced man.

"Suttunly," Mr. Bigstock was saying, "he ain't in there. He must 'a' got out at the back."

Miss Faviel hailed him breathlessly.

"The Chinaman, Chy Fang, is my nephew whom we've been looking for. He must be mad. Can you catch him?"

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Mr. Bigstock rose to the occasion with an alertness which was little short of the miraculous. He asked no questions. He made no promises. He did not so much as reply to Miss Faviel.

Turning to the pink-faced man he said,

"Sam, this is the chanst o' your life. Foller where I lead 'ee. He's a-gone through the shrubbery, I expect."

Stunned by the suddenness of his mission, the pink-faced man followed Mr. Bigstock without a word into the bushes, while Miss Faviel, turning round, found herself confronted by Judith Mallendon.

"My dear," said Miss Faviel, "that Chinaman is my nephew, and he's trying to disappear again."

"I know," said Judith unexpectedly, and to Miss Faviel's astonishment began to weep a little.

"Never mind, my dear," said Miss Faviel. "I'm sure he'll come back, if that dreadfully foolish policeman doesn't make a muddle. I only wish I could have sent some one else after him."

"I sent Jimmy," said Judith, "and his friend. But I wish I knew—knew——"

"There—there," said Miss Faviel. "Look at poor Monarch, quite apoplectic! He knew Richard at once, clever Monarch! And you did too, did you, my dear? Now, let us go for a little walk up and down together. I expect they will all be back soon, and then Richard will have to explain his behavior."

But in this expectation Miss Faviel was destined to be disappointed.

Faviel had started on his flight from the booth buoyantly. The success of his escape from the mill followed by his luck in effecting the exchange with Chy Fang, who had agreed to it with ineffable good

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humor and incuriousness—followed again by the skilful way in which he had put that last spoke in Blenkenstein's wheel—gave him a feeling of exultation which was like drinking wine. He had seen Judith, and to-morrow he would see her once more, and be released from these distracting fetters which had been fixed on him by the terms of the wager. He had only to lie hid till midnight and he would withal have won the wager.

While he was wondering where he should make his hiding-place, and unconsciously beginning to flag, Faviel became aware that he was pursued. Somehow he had not expected pursuit. He renewed his pace a little less exultant, making for the woods that lay aside The Ashlands. Presently, the exultation had died out, and he was like a tired man from whom the spirit of the wine he has drunk is fled, leaving a double lethargy. He began to realize that there was a price to be paid for his successes of the day and preceding night, the price of sheer exhaustion. He had spent six days in close confinement, followed by a sleepless night of hot pursuit and a day of great strain. The facts came upon him, together with a looseness of the knees and a faint feeling. He felt that he could not run much further.

Up to now he had kept his handicap so well that he had not been visible to his pursuers, or rather they had not been visible to him. He could only hear them as they must have been able to hear him.

Turning now, as he reached an open glade, he saw Mr. Boke among the trees not thirty yards off. He stopped. It was no good being run down and caught without a breath in his body. He would sooner stand and make a fight of it. How many of them were

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after him? A lust of anger filled him, as he balanced the chances of his being taken at the last moment like a fool, and he stopped and picked a heavy stump of wood out of some fagots that lay in a pile on the ground beside him.

"Look out for yourself!" he said to Mr. Boke, as the latter drew near.

Mr. Boke pulled up. He also was getting his breath with difficulty. The two stood facing one another for an appreciable time before Mr. Boke could speak.

"All right, sir," he said. "I'm not after you. I've changed sides. There ain't time to explain, but your lady aunt has promised me a hundred if you turn up to-morrow, and I've broke with Mr. B. He an' Cop an' Bilks are after you now. Can you git on, sir?"

"No," said Faviel. He scarcely knew whether to believe Mr. Boke or not, but in any case he could not get on, and he said so calmly.

"Then there's on'y one thing to be done," said Mr. Boke. "Lie low—under those sticks or anywhere—I'll go on an' mix the scent. Lie down, sir, for your own sake. There they are a-coming. I'm off."

Faviel flopped down in a crevasse among the fagots, as Mr. Boke, with a heroic spirit, crossed the glade and plunged into the trees beyond.

"There 'e goes!"

"Come on!"

Bilks and Blenkenstein issued into the glade almost simultaneously with Mr. Boke's dive into the further wood, and they followed him without stopping. Wedged in among the fagots as helpless as a rabbit in a wire, Faviel watched them go, and having waited

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a minute to give them time to vanish, decided he had better wriggle himself out. Turning for that purpose, he saw the leering face of Coppenwell above him, and next moment received a blow on the head from the very stump of wood he had himself laid down.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE LAST DAY—(6)—FIVE MINUTES PAST SEVEN
O'CLOCK P. M.—MR. BOKE HAS HIS REVENGE

MR. BOKE, though, in a sporting spirit, he had drawn the scent, as he supposed, away from Mr. Faviel and upon himself, had no intention of sacrificing himself more than was needful.

By leading his pursuers into the open country he might, no doubt, give Mr. Faviel the very best chance of being quit of them; but then running was not his forte, and the idea of being caught at some distance from civilization by his late colleagues and Mr. Blenkenstein was not to his mind at all. Their reasonableness, on discovering that he had tricked them, would be at a very low ebb; and it was highly likely that Mr. Coppenwell's lively brain would suggest that Mr. Boke should suffer in Mr. Faviel's place, a suggestion the others, in their wrought-up condition, would only too probably fall in with.

Mr. Coppenwell, as we know, was not with the other two. Having seen his chance, that sage youth had determined to seize it, and win glory and gold for himself by capturing Mr. Faviel single-handed.

Mr. Boke did not know of this, of course, but in any case his tactics would in all probability have been the same. They consisted in keeping just so much ahead as to avoid the full glare of publicity, while, at

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the same time, by turning and doubling perpetually, he was gradually retracing his steps towards The Ashlands.

Whether he would reach that haven of refuge before the storm, so to speak, broke, was a problem which had become exceedingly doubtful, when chance unexpectedly favored him. As he burst out of a thinnish copse—in the course of traversing which he had had the dubious pleasure of observing that Mr. Blenkenstein, who was leading, had gained on him considerably and would recognize him in turn at the next open bit—Mr. Boke perceived ahead of him two men. One was a police constable, Mr. Bigstock, in fact; the other was the pink-faced man who had, on a memorable occasion, driven the cart containing the wardrobe halfway to the mill at Hanging Coppice.

As soon as they saw Mr. Boke they stopped. Mr. Boke also stopped.

"Ha' you," said Mr. Bigstock severely, "seen a young man, what, being a lunatic, has escaped somewhere into this here wood?"

Even while he spoke, Blenkenstein was thudding towards them through the coppice from which Mr. Boke had just emerged.

"Yes," said Mr. Boke, rising to the emergency, "I have. Here he is! Hold him!"

"Stand by, Sam," said Mr. Bigstock steadily, and the pink-faced man stood by. Mr. Bigstock in council or on the trail might be liable to confusion; Mr. Bigstock in action was limpidly direct. As Blenkenstein ran out from the trees, the big constable had him in a moment. Blenkenstein was a big man himself, but he was not possessed of Mr. Bigstock's muscle. He tried to free himself in vain.

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"What the devil are you up to?" he yelled, as Mr. Bigstock gripped him closer.

"Got that bit o' rope, Sam?" asked Mr. Bigstock.

Almost before he could get out an explanation, Blenkenstein's hands had been firmly secured by the pink-faced man.

"Now then, quiet?" said Mr. Bigstock, "or I'll have to gag 'ee."

"Well done," said Mr. Boke, who was hovering on the outskirts of the fray, keenly listening for the footsteps of Bilks and Coppinwell. Presumably they had seen the policeman, and, like guilty men, had fled, instead of advancing. "Well done, constable. I don't mind tellin' you I was after him myself. I'm a private detective."

"Are you?" said Mr. Bigstock deferentially. "You've bin arter 'im some time, haven't you?"

"Yes. But he's got the better of me. Turned on me," said Mr. Boke. "I didn't like it. These lunatics are pretty strong. Anyway, it's your capture, and I don't ask for any credit. I've never seen a smarter bit of work."

Mr. Bigstock beamed at this professional praise.

"Look here, constable," said Blenkenstein, who had recovered his temper sufficiently to see that execration in itself would not release him from Mr. Bigstock's grip. "That man's a liar. He's a man I've employed and turned off. My name is Blenkenstein, and I am stopping at The Ashlands. If you don't believe me ask the man who is behind——"

"What man?" asked Mr. Bigstock incredulously.

"The man who——" Blenkenstein suddenly realized that his ally was not visible. "He was just behind me in the wood there."

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"Deloosions!" said Mr. Boke, tapping his head sympathetically. "Poor chap."

"I 'ad a uncle," said the pink-faced man, with considerable interest, "took just that way. Always used to be thinkin' as he was follered, sometimes by his uncle as 'ad brought 'im up, with a stick; sometimes by goblins. It was the drink did it with my uncle."

"Never you mind about your uncle, Sam," said Mr. Bigstock practically. "What we've got to consider is where to take him."

A hope sprung up in Blenkenstein's mind. If this fool took him back at once, something might still be done. The hope was blighted by Mr. Boke's agency.

"I'm not advising you, constable," he said genially. "You know what's what. I kin see that. But if a suggestion ain't offensive, I'm wondering if they'd much care to have him—being a looney—in the middle o' the show."

"His aunt as is looking for 'im's there," said Mr. Bigstock doubtfully.

"If you happened to be thinkin'," said Mr. Boke, "o' taking him straight to Waybury, where he'd be quieter and safer, I could go back to The Ashlands an' tell the old lady. If you like. I ain't nothing on my hands that would prevent it."

"Thanky," said Mr. Bigstock. "That's what I'll do then. Sam! As I said afore, this is the chanst of your life. Do you think you could get round an' bring your trap into the wood here?"

"You'll rue this, you fool!" said Blenkenstein passionately.

"Quiet!" said Mr. Bigstock soothingly, and repeated the advice when, Blenkenstein's coolness having left him, he alternately threatened and adjured him.

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Blenkenstein made one last desperate effort by an appeal to Mr. Boke.

"I'll give you five hundred pounds," he said, "if you'll tell this fool you're lying to him."

Mr. Boke shook his head. It was doubtful if Mr. Bigstock, having once got an idea into him, would consent to have it extracted again. But, in any case, Mr. Boke was beyond corruption.

"You go to Waybury, sir," he said coaxingly, "and then you'll get your rights."

"A thousand!" said Blenkenstein.

"I don't trust you, sir," said Mr. Boke in a low voice, "and if I did, I wouldn't play Mr. Faviel such a dirty trick, as to go back on him now. Sport's sport, sir, as you may learn some day, if you try hard enough."

Mr. Boke went off with the pink-faced man, and, a quarter of an hour later, the pink-faced man drove Mr. Bigstock and Blenkenstein to Waybury.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE END OF IT ALL

It was noon on Sunday, and O'Levin was beginning to wonder if he was ever going to succeed in making Lady Mallendon realize what the rights of Faviel's case were. Lady Mallendon was at once displeased, puzzled, offended and astonished at the various things that had happened since seven o'clock the previous evening. The disappearance of Chy Fang was, she considered, calculated to spoil the receipts of the fête very greatly, if not entirely; as people could not be expected to pay sixpence to see a conjurer who was not there. O'Levin had suggested at the time that they should pay sixpence for the privilege of being allowed into the smoky booth to see if they could find the conjurer; but Lady Mallendon thought this savored of deception.

Secondly, the disappearance of Blenkenstein had been very trying. Judith had admitted, under cross-examination, that Mr. Blenkenstein had not proposed to her again, and that she was very glad of it, because she had made up her mind that she could not accept him. Lady Mallendon had said that she did not wish to say anything unkind about anybody, but she thought that Judith was foolish, and that Mr. Blenkenstein was unmannerly. Mr. Blenkenstein need not have proposed, but he ought not to have gone away without saying good-by.

Thirdly, the reappearance at a late hour of Jimmy and Augustus, who had been in search of the Chinaman, it seemed, or rather of Mr. Faviel—for every one seemed agreed that Mr. Faviel had been the Chinaman—but who would not say whether they had found him or not, and indeed, would say nothing, except that it was all right, and Mr. Faviel would call to-morrow, had vexed Lady Mallendon excessively. She did not know why she should be left in the dark, or what would have happened if the Chinaman, instead of being Mr. Faviel and disappearing, had been a lunatic, and had set on Jimmy and Augustus, and perhaps killed them. She did not like to think what would have happened.

Last night's happenings, then, had offended and astonished Lady Mallendon. This morning's puzzled and offended her. To begin with, Blenkenstein had reappeared. He had only effected his release at a late hour the night before, and had been, as a consequence, compelled to sleep at Waybury. He had asked to see Judith at once, and having seen her, had gone away. An hour later Faviel had come. He had asked to see O'Levin in the first place, and, having seen him, had asked him to ask Judith to go into the garden. Judith had gone into the garden.

"Where, I suppose, she is now?" said Lady Mallendon.

"I believe so," said O'Levin.

"And you think she is going to accept Mr. Faviel?"

"Well," said O'Levin, "I've never been enough of a matchmaker meself to be able to answer for a thing like that, bedad. But from what I've read, in breach of promise cases and so forth, I take ut there was some sort of likelihood of it. I couldn't tell ye exactly

what it was that make me think it, a fire in Miss Judith's eye, maybe, or a tear. I misremember which. But anyway, there wasn't anybody else in the garden that I cud see, that she was likely to engage herself to——"

"And you think," said Lady Mallendon, "that on the whole, Mr. Faviel has not behaved dishonorably? Sir Jasper, I know, would never give his consent, if he thought Mr. Faviel had——"

"That'll be all right," said O'Levin. "Dick has played cricket, as the phrase goes."

"But a cricketer," said Lady Mallendon, fixing on a weak point, "is not necessarily honorable."

"It's only a phrase, I assure ye," said O'Levin. "I meant Dick Faviel could hold up his head over the matter, thanks to Jimmy and Butt, in part. In this case, it was the babes in the wood did for the man."

"Dreadful!" said Lady Mallendon. "I cannot bear to think of it."

"They did it beautifully," said O'Levin. "Came up just at the right moment—couldn't have got it more right if there'd been a call-boy—just when Dick was feeling silly from that knock on the head, and made Mr. Coppenwell, as the gentleman's name is, feel like a rabbit between two ferrets inside of four minutes, so Faviel says. After that, friend Augustus sat on his head, and Jimmy, with customary prudence, knotted him up in his own braces, if ye'll excuse mintion of the same."

"I think Mr. Faviel might have come back at that point, or at least explained to Jimmy, and told Jimmy to inform me of the circumstances, instead of doing just the opposite."

"Ye see that was all in the wager," explained

O'Levin patiently. "Blenkenstein arranged it all very cunningly."

"Much too cunningly, I think," said Lady Mallendon severely. "I am sorry for Mr. Blenkenstein, but I do not think he has behaved well, whatever Mr. Faviel may have done."

"That's it," said O'Levin. "He hasn't, but he's going to pay ten thousand pounds for not being on his best behavior, so we ought to forgive him."

"Do you think he will?" asked Lady Mallendon.

"I think so," said O'Levin. He had seen Blenkenstein since his release—not a pleasant sight to see. The man's usual stolid reserve and self-satisfied manner of superman had gone under at the interview; and he had exhibited every phase of emotion from murderous fury to abject misery. In so many words he had told O'Levin that if he could have guessed the way things would go, he would have caused Faviel's final disappearance. He made no secret of the fact that he had begun by cheating and would have ended if necessary by conspiring to murder. O'Levin was rather glad that he had ended up more quietly. It seemed as though, at some point in the course of his wooing, his fancy for Judith had developed into a consuming passion, in which the mere desire of possession had changed to something more worthy. It was a revelation of an old truth that brutes can love, and, loving, can cease to be altogether brutes. He would do anything now to win Miss Mallendon's esteem, but he supposed she would never want to see him again? O'Levin took it upon himself to say that it would be distinctly inadvisable to attempt an interview for a long time to come. He had left Blenkenstein sullenly wretched; but recovering a little of his

heavy cunning manner: wrapped in which, it was fairly safe to assume, he would presently return to his usual self—neither so violent nor yet so human as hate and love combined had for the moment made him. O'Levin did not think fit to enlarge upon these aspects of Blenkenstein to his late admirer, Lady Mallendon, but went on: "Getting the money'll be like drawing a tooth, but the tooth'll come. Ye see, we have mutual acquaintances, and he will not want to drop out of his circle entirely. By the way," added O'Levin cunningly, seeing that Lady Mallendon had begun to soften, "Dick was awfully grateful to you for keeping the promise to invite the Chinaman down. But for that things might have gone hard with him."

"Well, of course I am glad to have been of service," said Lady Mallendon, distinctly mollified, "and if only Mr. Faviel had taken me into his confidence from the first, which you say was impossible, I should have been glad to do more. As it is, Mr. Faviel must blame himself if I have not seemed sympathetic throughout."

"Oh, he does," said O'Levin. "Ye should hear him."

"I wonder," said Lady Mallendon, arising as her curiosity now began to outweigh her sense of injury, "I wonder if they have settled anything. Shall we take a turn in the garden, Mr. O'Levin? Judith is so very reserved that even now, after all his adventures for her sake, and when I think of the wardrobe and the mill, and that smoky tent, and all those dreadful men whom Mr. Blenkenstein employed in so ungentlemanly a manner, it makes me quite nervous. Poor Mr. Faviel may still be as far from knowing what I am sure he must be very anxious to know as

ever. Oh, Mr. Bayford," added Lady Mallendon, as the rector was announced on their way out, "how good of you to come! I hope you have excused our want of attendance this morning, but really, after yesterday, no one except Sir Jasper felt fit to stir, and I believe he went off to have a bathe."

"Cleanliness," said Mr. Bayford felicitously, "is next to godliness, next to godliness. I trust you are none the worse for yesterday's exertion. The charity must be very grateful to you, very grateful, I am sure."

"Not a bit," said Lady Mallendon. "And Mr. Wormyer is coming, I hope?"

"Wormyer," said Mr. Bayford, "has already come. He has gone into the garden."

"Let us go, too," said Lady Mallendon. "Lunch won't be for a quarter of an hour yet."

"Has anything," inquired Mr. Bayford, as they took their way in that direction, "has anything been heard of that unfortunate young man who disappeared yesterday?"

"Oh, yes," said Lady Mallendon, pleased to be able to instruct rather than be instructed, "he has come back. In fact he is in the garden now, proposing to my niece."

"How very romantic, and—and astonishing!" said Mr. Bayford. "Truly astonishing, and romantic!"

"Yes, we are very pleased about it," said Lady Mallendon. "Mr. Faviel is so very nice, he is a great traveler, you know; but the wager he has just won really puts any of his previous achievements quite into the shade."

And she related details of this affair to Mr. Bayford,

until it was not clear to O'Levin whether Mr. Bayford or she were the more mystified.

"I did hear from one of my parishioners this morning," said Mr. Bayford, "of the unfortunate, or, as it turns out, most fortunate mistake made by the constable from Waybury. The constable himself is naturally indignant at losing a chance of *kudos*, so they say, so they say. Good-morning, Miss Finch. Fresh as ever after the dramatic triumphs, fresh as ever, I see."

Miss Finch looked indeed rather fresher than ever, as she stood there in front of Mr. Bayford, with Mr. Wormyer by her side. Her cheeks were aglow, as with a recent blush, and the glow was renewed, as Mr. Wormyer, who had something of the eel in his manner, suddenly spoke out.

"Lady Mallendon, Mr. Bayford," said Mr. Wormyer painfully. "There is something that I ought, I think, to tell you."

"Good gracious!" said Lady Mallendon, not a little alarmed.

"Speak up, Wormyer, speak up," said Mr. Bayford encouragingly.

"I have, that is to say, Robina and I," said Mr. Wormyer, shyly but manfully, "are engaged to be married."

"My dear Miss Finch!" said Lady Mallendon kindly.

"Robina and you, Wormyer," said Mr. Bayford, "are engaged to be—who, Wormyer, is Robina?"

"Miss Finch," said Mr. Wormyer, "is—is to be the lodestar of my lonely life, if I may say so."

"Oh, ah," said Mr. Bayford, shaking his head gaily at Miss Finch. "I perceive, I understand. Worm-

yer, Wormyer! You are a lucky man, a fortunate fellow. Miss Finch, Robina, as perhaps I should call you; Wormyer is a good fellow; I know Wormyer well. I congratulate you both, heartily, heartily."

Mr. Bayford hastened on with Lady Mallendon, leaving O'Levin to tender his congratulations.

"Yes," said Mr. Bayford, in response to Lady Mallendon's question. "I am pleased, thoroughly pleased. It will increase Wormyer's standing if he is married. It will increase his standing."

"And about their income?" asked Lady Mallendon.

"Wormyer is getting a hundred a year," said Mr. Bayford. "I shall make a point of seeing that he has a hundred and twenty in future. Wormyer is a good fellow, a good fellow."

Any comment that Lady Mallendon might have been going to make upon this generous undertaking of Mr. Bayford's, was put out of her mind by the appearance, round a bend of the path, of Judith and Faviel.

"Have you come to congratulate me, Auntie?" said Judith.

"Yes," said Lady Mallendon. "I mean that I have come to congratulate Mr. Faviel."

Mr. Faviel was delighted, as he had every reason to be.

"It's awfully nice of you to say so," he said, "after my disgraceful behavior. But I couldn't very well help it, you know, once I had taken on the wager."

"No, of course not," said Lady Mallendon warmly. "It was all Mr. Blenkenstein's fault."

"Or Judith's," suggested Faviel. "So my aunt, whom I saw on my way here, said. She is very sorry

for Blenkenstein. She says he behaved very generously."

"Where is Miss Faviel?" asked Lady Mallendon. "I should like to see her again now that she is to be Judith's aunt. I mean, of course, that I should like it anyhow, but particularly for that reason."

"She said she was going to lunch at the Warleys'."

"Couldn't we send over and fetch her, and the Warleys too?" suggested Lady Mallendon hospitably.

"Not for lunch, Aunt Georgy," said Judith. "We might for tea. There's a friend of Dick's there too,"—Judith blushed a little—"Mr. Wilton. Dick thinks that he's in love with Etta."

"How nice!" said Lady Mallendon. "Then of course he would come too, wouldn't he? It would be so nice, wouldn't it?" she said to Mr. Bayford, moving on again as the lunch-bell sounded. "Three engaged couples, all so unexpected."

"Quite a gathering of love-birds," said Mr. Bayford. "Quite a collection of love-birds. Ha! luncheon, I perceive, luncheon!"

Later in the day, when the gathering had actually been effected, Jimmy and Butt, at a suggestion from O'Levin, combined to decoy Mr. Bayford to the distant cottage of a parishioner: that of the deaf old lady, who only used her ear-trumpet on state occasions. This having been successfully accomplished, every one felt, as O'Levin said, that there was nothing left to wish for.

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